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The Border King; OR, THE SECRET FOE.

BY OLL COOMES,

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CHAPTER I. UNDER THE SNOW.

FIVE years ago.

It was November, and a wild storm was sweeping down from the boreal regions.

Up out of one of those Coteau des Prairies of northern Montana rose the round bald peaks of Panther Mountain, bleak and grim against the wintry sky. The Powder river on the right and the Big Horn on the left defined its eastern and western boundaries respectively; while the Tongue, cutting its way northward through the hills, poured its waters into the Yellowstone near Fort Alexander.

But little else than desolation met the eye in these regions that bleak November day; for not the sign of a habitation could be seen around. Even from the summit of the highest peak not a sign of life was visible except a solitary figure making its way northward through the gathering shadows of evening twilight. It was the figure of a white man, clothed in the rude habiliments of an Indian warrior, and armed with a rifle, tomahawk, and brace of revolvers. Upon his back he bore the hind-quarters of a deer, which had evidently been recently slain.

He was journeying eastward across an open, level plateau between the base of the Panther Hills and the Powder river, and was walking hastily, very likely to reach his camp, or a place to camp, somewhere within the belt of cottonwoods bordering the river before him.

The distant howling of the wolves among the hills, and the sharp barking of coyotes upon the plain, as well as the threatening condition of the clouded sky, appeared to be extra incentives to the man's haste; for occasionally he would glance uneasily around him, scan the lowering clouds, then quicken his footsteps.

As darkness came on the heavens gradually assumed a misty-gray color, and the wind, shifting to the north-

east—directly into the face of the hunter—grew heavy, dismal, and damp. Everything around him portended the coming of a snow-storm—one of those beating, blinding, and drifting storms so peculiar to this northern latitude, through which it is impossible for man or beast to journey.

Fully impressed with the dangers that hung over him, the hunter pressed on, still clinging to his load as if his life depended upon saving it. Mile after mile he left behind him, and still the river was miles away.

At length, despite the gloom of night, he sees something like a mighty, snow-white sail, reaching from heaven to earth and bellying to the wind, coming down toward him from the northwest. He knows what it is—a whirlwind of snow. He shudders and draws his blanket closer around him. Then follows a sound like the confused rush of a million tiny wings, and the storm is upon him—striking like the

blinding sands of Sahara strike the doomed traveler.

He pauses, and, drawing his blanket hood-like over his head, turns his back to the storm. He cannot move on with the blinding snow beating into his eyes and face—he cannot see a yard before him.

Mingled with that silent awfulness of the storm, he can still hear the long, mournful howling of the wolves and the dismal chattering of the coyotes, and these sounds impress him more fully of his perilous situation. But he cannot go on. He is snow-bound, and there upon the open plain, with the shadows of night around him, he must breast the storm and its attending dangers for—who could tell how long?

Acting upon a sudden impulse, he all at once throws down his meat; then with his foot he scrapes aside the snow at his feet and seats himself upon the earth. Then he draws his blanket closer around him and tucks its edges under him. He secures his rifle and loosens his revolvers, and, with his tomahawk clasped firmly in his hand, he remains motionless and silent with his thoughts, while the great storm-king weaves and twines a sheet of crystal white around him.

Thus the moments glided into minutes, and the minutes into hours. Still the storm rages on. Deeper and deeper grows the snow upon the plain, and thicker and thicker weaves the storm its mantle of flakes around the lonely hunter, until only a little white mound of snow told where he had sat down alone upon the treeless and shrubless plain. But within his crystal palace, warm and quiet, sat the hunter. Experience had undoubtedly taught him that this recourse was the only one, under the circumstances, for his life, strange as it may seem to those unacquainted with the fact.

The howl of the wolves and the roar of the storm were now hushed to him. From the beasts he felt no fear now; and with his own revolving thoughts he sat in companionship. And thus the hours wore on; he could do nothing but ponder over his situation. But at length he was startled from his gloomy thoughts by the dull vibratory jarring of the earth beneath him, as if many hooved feet were rushing over it.

But surely this could not be the case, he thought. No human could travel on horseback such a night as that. It was not the headlong rush of buffaloes, for they had long since passed to the pasture-fields of the south. And so what was it? He repeated



FOGHORN PHIL LISTENING TO THE MYSTERIOUS NOISE.

the question; then an awful thought rushed suddenly across the soul of the hunter, and, for the first time, a horrible fear convulsed his whole frame!

CHAPTER II. THE STORM-RIDERS.

Nor alone was that solitary hunter upon the plain that wild November night. The shadows of darkness had closed in upon two persons—a man and woman—who were journeying westward upon horseback toward the Black Pass of the Panther Hills. They were mounted upon fleet, strong-limbed animals, and were following an old and unfrequented trail that crossed the Powder river, wound its way through the hills and then made an abrupt bend to the right, and ran northward along the valley of the Tongue river, far beyond the Missouri.

The man was securely bundled up in a great buffalo overcoat; his feet were incased in shoes of the same material; fur gloves were upon his hands, with gauntlets reaching to his elbows, and upon his head he wore a cap which was drawn down over his face, concealing his brow and eyes. The lower part of his face was covered with a tremendous black beard, which, with the force of the wind, parted over his breast and streamed out on either side in confused masses. His companion was also warmly wrapped in furs, but her face was uncovered—a pretty, pale face, that looked out, with its great brown eyes, from between the borders of a beaver hood—telling that she was quite young—probably not over eighteen years.

Strong-limbed and swift were their horses, but the carriage of their heads, dilated nostrils, and white, smoking flanks told that they had been long and sharply ridden. And a long, long way it must have been, too, if they had come that day from the nearest settlement to the east of them.

Whither could they be going at such a season of the year?

As the shadows of night deepened over the plain, the man would glance uneasily around him, and at the dull, threatening sky, and then, as if to conceal from his companion his inward fears, he would counsel a slower rate of speed, on the ground of husbanding the strength of their noble beasts.

"But, Herman," the pretty young girl at his side said, pleadingly, and with a subdued tone of fear, "our animals are more able to carry us on to our destination at this speed than we are to run risks of the dangers that delay is sure to bring upon us."

"Fie, Camilla," returned the bearded man, in a strange, gruff voice that betrayed an indifference to their situation, "you need have no fears of the coming night, nor lament over apprehended dangers. The world would be none the worse off if either of us should never be seen alive again."

"Oh, Herman, Herman Rochelle!" cried the beautiful girl, in a voice that told of a sad, anguish-burdened heart, "don't talk so, Herman; it is very cruel—wicked!"

"Cruel—wicked," replied the man, with a cold, harsh laugh; "don't talk of wickedness to me, my dear Camilla."

A sigh escaped the girl's lips—a sigh that deepened almost into a sob, and the cold night wind seemed to hurl back to her ears the cold, strange laugh of the mysterious Herman Rochelle.

Then a silence ensued that was only broken by the snorting of the animals, and the pounding of their iron-shod hoofs upon the hard, frozen earth, as they sped on through the gathering gloom.

Suddenly a thrill of horror passed through the maiden's heart, as the sharp bark of a wolf broke distinctly upon her ears. The sound was immediately taken up and answered from a dozen directions, and it at once became evident that the plain was swarming with those ravenous beasts of prey.

"Oh, Herman!" cried the girl, unable to restrain her emotions longer, "hear—hear those terrible beasts! Oh, God have mercy!"

But Herman was deaf to her cry. He made no reply, but grim and silent he galloped on.

Plainer and plainer—nearer and nearer sounded the gibbering cry of the wolves, as, emboldened by their gathering force, they drew closer and closer. At length the silent riders can see dark forms skimming over the brown, grassy plain around them—to the right and left.

Both know what they are—gaunt, hungry wolves. With a feeling of strange terror stealing over her, Camilla watches the skulking beasts, and in a short time their number increases until a sea of shaggy forms seems to surround them.

And now again the pale young girl, wearied almost to death with hard riding and with nerves unstrung by fear, cries out in anguish of heart to her grim, bearded companion; but the man of stone makes no reply—speaks never a word of encouragement to the poor young thing whose lovely face should have been, of itself, a silent appeal to the stoniest heart.

And all this time the wind blowing steadily from the north-west, damp, dismal and chilly. And then as if to add new terrors to the soul of the girl, *it began to snow!* Great flakes, fleecy and damp, fell at first, but they soon grew smaller and thicker, and fell faster and faster.

Surrounded by the gloom of night and close pressed by a host of hungry wolves, this strange couple now became storm-riders. They were, however, traveling across the wind, else they would have been unable to journey at all.

Faster and faster, thicker and thicker fell the snow, until the air seemed almost packed with the crystal flakes. The earth was soon enshrouded in its wintry robe, and now against the ghostly background, that mass of jostling, snarling wolves could be seen pressing close upon the heels of the riders' horses.

"My God, Herman!" at length the girl broke forth, "why did we ever venture forth upon this journey?"

A low, strange laugh, that chilled the heart of Camilla, came slowly from the bearded lips of the storm-rider; then all relapsed into a mysterious silence again.

They soon reached the banks of the Powder river, but did not halt. The stream was frozen over, and plunging down the bank, they galloped across and sped on toward the dark pass in the Panther Hills.

And still the snow fell thick and fast, and the surging wind and snarling of that living tide behind, mingled with the steady crunch, crunch of the animals' feet in the light, crispy snow—all seemed to Camilla like the sounds one hears in a horrible dream.

Horses and riders soon became enveloped in a sheet of spotless white, and now, like an old snow-god, the man appeared with his great black beard and hairy coat loaded down with the white frosty crystals of the storm.

No word or complaint fell from the young girl's lips; and yet it was an awful night for such a frail, tender creature to be abroad upon such a plain, weary miles from a solitary habitation, and withstand the terrors of such a storm with such self-sacrificing resignation. Her companion never inquired after her comfort; he seemed fully aware of her indomitable will and power of endurance, and with his face looking ever ahead, galloped on and on.

The snow deepening upon the plain made it more laborious for the animals, while the wolves, half-buried at each bound, came tumbling and plunging on with a desperation that attested their hungering ferocity.

For hours the two storm-riders pressed on, and at length the fury of the storm began to abate. The sky, although still overcast with fleecy, white clouds, grew lighter, and the snow fell sparse and fine. But now the wind became biting cold, and seemed to pierce through the heavy furs of the woman, driving all hope and strength from her heart. In tones of despair she again speaks.

"Herman," she said, "I can never survive this night. I am perishing with cold and fatigue."

This appeal seemed to touch the hitherto stony heart of the man, and he replied:

"Cheer up a little while longer, dear Camilla. Let us trust to Heaven. The storm is already breaking away."

A minute afterward the snow ceased to fall; the clouds overhead parted, and the great, round moon looked down to earth, that now lay wrapped in its mantle of white.

As they galloped on, a dark object on the spotless snow at the left, suddenly caught the eye of Camilla. A cry arose to her lips—a cry of strange horror, for she saw that the object was a human head—the head of a man set upright upon the snow! The face was turned toward her, and its great eyes stared up at her face, and the features seemingly possessed of life, struck a strange numbness into her very heart.

"What did it mean?—a human head there, bolt upright upon the white, glistening snow—a head whose face she *had seen before!*

Thus Camilla questioned her own mind, but before she could conceive any definite answer, or even give a second glance at the mysterious object, that now loomed up before her vision like the Sphinx, they had galloped apast it—on toward the Hills. And then the clouds over-

head had shut together and struck out the light of the moon, and the snow began to whirl through the air again.

Still on went the storm-riders, and still on, close behind, pressed that pack of ravenous beasts.

At length the dark wooded pass of Panther Mountain is reached, and into its shadowy depths glide the twain.

Low, scrubby pines stretch their bristling boughs, now laden with snow, over the pass, lending an additional gloom to the narrow way.

and again the cold moon looks to earth, making checkers of light and shadow in the pass as its

Again the clouds overhead break away, beams play down through the net-work of branches over the heads of the storm-riders.

Half an hour, and the Black Pass of the Panther Hills is cleared and the valley of the Tongue river reached.

But, God of mercy, where is Camilla?

Herman, the bearded rider, emerges from the pass into the white valley alone. He seems unconscious of this until clear of the shadows of the Hills. Then he rises in his stirrups and looks back. He sees Camilla's horse glide from the pass wild with terror, and—

Riderless!

Then to his ears comes a Babel of wolfish cries far back in the pass. A strange, weird sound, half laugh and half moan escapes the man's lips. He sinks into his saddle, digs his roweled heels into the steaming sides of his panting beast and gallops away, as if from the wrath of the inscrutable God.

Then again the sky is overcast. The moon hides its face, as if with shame, behind the clouds, and once more the snow begins to fall. And who, save the All-Seeing Eye and that mysterious, bearded storm-rider, knew what an awful tragedy, over which the storm-king had drawn his curtain, had been enacted within the Black Pass of Panther Hill, that wild November night, five years ago?

Alas! who indeed?

CHAPTER III.

THE BIG HORN TRADERS.

THE time and scene of our story changes. The summer of 1870 had drawn to a close, and autumn was well advanced. Still, traces of the season just past, lingered upon the plain and in the forest, and everywhere that beauteous wealth of the summer was ripening into the gorgeousness of autumn.

The fur season had now come, and with it, unusual activity among the traders and trappers, whose fields of operation were along the Missouri river and its upper tributaries. The year had been a favorable one for fecundation among the fur-bearing animals, and so beaver, otter, deer and buffalo abounded in numbers equal to the demand. Although there were a great number of white men engaged in trapping, they formed a small per cent. of the general army of hunters; the Indians coming in for the greater share. To those engaged in fur-trading, this proved a great pecuniary benefit, for they could always get better trades out of the Indians than the whites. In fact, a stock of powder and lead, a few gallons of bad whisky, and some cheap trinkets, could be traded to the Indians for ten times their value in furs, and in this manner some parties made the business a lucrative one. These traders would appoint a certain time for the Indians to meet them at some designated point on the river to exchange their furs for goods; and rival parties hearing of this appointment, would often run in ahead and secure the peltries, as the Indians were in no ways particular who they traded with so they obtained what they wanted.

This system of rivalry in the fur business soon grew into a spirit of bitter enmity, that at times threatened open violence. This was the case, especially with two companies, the Big Horn traders, and the Milk River Fur Company, as they styled themselves. They had trespassed upon each other's grounds until a bitter hostility had sprung up between them, there being no territorial law by means of which each party could protect its territory against the encroachments of the other.

With these two companies we have to do. The Big Horn traders were under the command of one Roscoe Rhym, and were composed of hunters from the Yellowstone and Big Horn rivers. They were all American, and men who had seen much service on the frontier. The head-quarters, of this company was at Fort Union, at the mouth of the Yellowstone. The Milk River party was under the leadership of one Henri Nogle, a man of French extraction

and questionable character. The party was principally made up of Sioux Indians and French half-breeds, with a few rough characters from the States. The Big Horns numbered in all about twenty men, and the Milk Rivers, about thirty; and although they had never met face to face, each party had sworn to wreak a terrible vengeance upon the other on the first occasion offered; and as they were men who feared no dangers, the conflict threatened to be a deadly one when it did come.

The day was well spent—a balmy October day of the year above mentioned—when a large flat-boat was descending the Missouri river about five miles above the mouth of the Milk. It was the boat of the Big Horn Traders, who were returning from a trading trip up the river, and the bundles of skins and furs piled upon the deck bore evidence of its having been a successful one.

The traders were all aboard the craft, with the exception of two scouts sent on in advance of the boat to reconnoiter the way, and in addition to the party, there were a couple of young men aboard who did not belong to the company, but had, for the sake of sport and adventure, accompanied the traders up the river.

Captain Roscoe Rhymn, the leader of the band, was a man of about thirty years, and a little above the medium size. He might have been called handsome by some, but to the closer student of human nature, there was the air of a cold, stern, arbitrary disposition, and a cold, unsympathizing heart, lurking within the shadows of his dark eyes and about his full, sensual mouth, that more than neutralized the prepossessing points of the external man. But, for all this, Rhymn was well liked by his men, and those thrown into his company; for on the border, a man's real worth and honesty are not to be measured by his rough hands, bearded face and rale, uncomely dress. Physical strength and courage, no difference how reckless the latter, and a dogmatical and indomitable will, are the main traits necessary to a good hunter, and no difference what his general character may have been in the past, if he possessed these requisites, he was admitted to the brotherhood and treated as one of its members, so long as he violated no law that was consistent with the borderman's code of honor. In none of these features had Rhymn been found wanting, on the contrary he had, so far, proved himself fully worthy of the confidence reposed in him.

The traders were mostly young men, full of life and the spirit of adventure. They were all dressed in buck-skin suits, and armed with rifles and revolvers of the most efficient kind.

Of the two young excursionists, in the traders' company, both claim our especial notice.

The oldest was a man of about five-and-twenty years of age. He was one of those persons whose clear, open countenance told of a kind, noble and generous heart, as well as a brave, fearless and jovial spirit. He was a person intended to win admiration and esteem wherever he went, for he was possessed of none of the selfish egotism of many of his rank, but of a correct comprehension of mankind and the world in general, learned in the school of adversity. In the war of the Great Civil Conflict, Robert Aylesworth went out as a private soldier, and as an evidence of his real worth, he soon rose from the ranks to the office of lieutenant-colonel, and was, in every respect, found worthy of the position and trust. It was rumored that the young colonel had been sent West in the secret service of the Government, and as he never denied, or confirmed the report, all considered the story true, and so no one assumed the impertinence to question him. But no difference what had been Colonel Aylesworth's object in coming West, it was not likely he would ever leave with as light a heart as that with which he had come, for the colonel was in love. In Miss Pauline Afton, the beautiful and accomplished niece of the commandant of Fort Union, he had met what threatened to be his fate, for either good or ill.

He had first met Miss Afton at the fort, where both had been spending the summer, Pauline visiting with her uncle's family. A mutual friendship had at first sprung up between them; this was cultivated daily in each other's society, and finally ripened into love. Aylesworth laid bare the emotions of his heart to her, and found that they were fully reciprocated by the lovely Pauline; and, so they became engaged.

The young colonel had no interest in the fur business with the Big Horn party, but had accompanied them from a pure love of adventure. He was a capital shot and a fine horseman, and on the buffalo chase few could excel him.

The other young man, Frank Bassett by name,

was a friend of the colonel's. He had come West to spend the summer and recuperate his health in the cool mountain air; but now the summer had passed, and still Frank Bassett remained in the West to the neglect of his business at home. None but the colonel knew why he did so—that a woman was at the bottom of it all.

The flat-boat was loaded with furs and buffaloskins, purchased from the Indians far up the river, and as it approached the mouth of the Milk river, the traders began to observe greater caution than usual, for the vicinity was at this time infested by hostile Indians. Besides, they were afraid the Milk River Traders had got wind of their approach, and might endeavor to plunder them of their cargo. To guard against such a surprise, a scout had been placed on each shore and sent on in advance of the boat to feel the way with caution; and so this relieved the crew of all fears of an ambush, and they were enabled to pass the time "spinning yarns," playing eucher, and having a "jolly" time in general.

As the day wore away, however, Captain Rhymn became thoughtful and silent in his demeanor, and betrayed a reticence quite at variance with his usual demeanor. This finally cast a spell of silence over his companions, and in little groups they gathered here and there and conversed in low tones on the probable cause of the captain's evident dejection. Colonel Aylesworth approached the captain, and throwing himself on a pile of furs before him, remarked:

"Captain Rhymn, I observe that the glories of this autumnal day inspire you with a silent admiration."

"Why, colonel, you're getting romantically eloquent," replied the captain, toying with the tips of his black mustache, while his dark eyes sparkled with good-humor. "The fact of it is, however, I was mentally reckoning the loss we would sustain should those Milk river fellows beat us to the Blackfoot agency; or set some trap to plunder us of what we already have on board."

"And what do you think our chances would be should we meet them openly on the river?"

"The chances would be good for a bitter old fight and the loss of some good, brave men. Those Milk Riverites will fight like Bengal tigers, and would rather do it than eat. They have the advantage in point of number, but this we can neutralize in our superiority of weapons. To-day is the fifth, and on the seventh we were to be at the Blackfoot agency. The Milk Rivers may have got wind of our appointment with the Blackfeet, and run in ahead of us, as they have frequently done. They can't possibly be more than half a day ahead of us, however, in securing the stock, for the Indians were not to be there before the seventh."

"In case they get ahead of us, we might possibly overtake them, or meet them on their return to the Milk river, and by virtue of our Henry repeaters, induce them to disgorge. I have a burning curiosity, captain, to look through the ranks of those Milk Riverites."

"Indeed?" replied the captain, and he fixed his eyes interrogatively upon the face of the young colonel, whose language all the while seemed to favor a collision with the Milk river party; "have you an old score to settle with some of its members?"

"Captain," and Aylesworth's voice fell almost to a whisper, "I know there has been a great deal of idle speculation over the object of my visit to this country, and there is not a doubt but that some have cast suspicion upon me. But, nevertheless, I was resolved to keep my business a secret, until I knew I had found a man whom I could trust and rely upon, under any emergency. My observation of yourself, captain, has convinced me that in you I can have a confidant, as I find one is necessary to the success of my business."

"No man, I hope, colonel," replied Rhymn, "ever had cause to regret having placed confidence in me; and I hope you will not be deceived. I have my faults, I freely admit, and many of them too; yet, I have never had the hand of man turned against me for a personal injury or insult."

"That is a record few men can boast of, Captain Rhymn," replied Aylesworth; "but in the matter in which I desire to enlist your confidence, you may, and you may not be of great service to me. But if you should aid me, captain, remember you shall be well paid—shall share with me the price of my success. The capture and deliverance of a certain man into the hands of the Government authorities, is the consideration of the stipulated reward. The

man was known, or at least supposed to have been indirectly concerned in the assassination of President Lincoln in April of the year 1865. He was seen in Omaha, Nebraska, two years after the terrible national tragedy, and it is supposed he sought safety in the far North-west, and, as a Government detective, I am here in search of him."

"Have you any assurance that your man was ever in this country, colonel?" Rhymn asked, producing his meerschaum and tobacco.

"Yes; from Omaha he went to a settlement in north Nebraska, and there married a young girl who was too good for the earth he tread on, putting it in strong language. Then, still later, he was seen further up this way. A certain hunter was overtaken by a heavy snow-storm one night in November, in the valley of the Powder river, not a great ways from the Panther Hills. He became snow-bound, and was compelled to stop in the open plain; and while there, a man and woman on horseback swept suddenly apart him, going in the direction of the Panther Hills. They were followed by a host of wolves, which the hunter escaped by burrowing under the snow. Well, it happened that, on the same night, another hunter saw this same man after he had passed through the Hills, but he was alone—the woman's horse following riderless behind. What the villain done with the woman, God only knows."

"And that villain was your man?"

"Yes; by adding link after link to the chain of circumstantial evidence, I find that that storm-rider was my man."

"Would you object to telling me his name, colonel?" asked Rhymn, puffing a cloud of smoke from his mouth.

"Not to you, captain," replied the colonel, in a still lower tone; "his real name was Bond, but after he came West, he assumed the name of Herman Rochelle."

"Herman Rochelle," repeated the captain, slowly, at the same time exchanging glances with the colonel, while his whole mind seemed plunged into a deep thought, "Herman Rochelle?"

"Yes; do you know of any one by that name?" asked Aylesworth.

Before the captain could make a reply, the sharp crack of a rifle came in startling echoes from down the river, and was immediately succeeded by a wail of agony.

"By heaven!" cried the captain, springing to his feet, "there is danger ahead, boys; our scouts are in trouble! To the sweeps, men, to the sweeps! Pull in toward the right shore!"

"Captain, look yonder!"

It was Colonel Aylesworth who spoke, as he laid one hand on Rhymn's shoulder, while with the other he pointed across toward the left shore, where appeared an apparition that sent a chill of strange terror through the colonel's veins!

CHAPTER IV. FOG HORN PHIL.

CAPTAIN ROSCOE RHYMN turned and looked in the direction indicated by the colonel's outstretched hand, just in time to see a clump of bushes close on a white, moving figure.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed the colonel, "she is gone!"

"She is gone?" repeated Rhymn; "do you mean to say you saw a woman where that white object flashed into the bushes over yonder?"

"I saw a woman or an angel, captain, with as pretty a white face as ever I looked upon," replied Aylesworth; "and what in the plague can it mean, such a face here in this outlandish country?"

"I can't tell you, colonel," Rhymn said, shaking his head thoughtfully; "what did she look like—I mean in form and feature?"

"I couldn't hardly tell the color of her eyes and hair, captain—the distance was too great; but if I hadn't been such a dolt, and pointed my finger at her, you might have got a chance at her face. But, as near as I could judge, her hair was black and hung down her back in braided rolls, while her eyes were of—well, I couldn't tell you what color; but I'll swear she was the prettiest creature I ever saw."

"It must have been Miss Pauline Afton, then," said the captain, with a soft peal of laughter.

Aylesworth blushed and stammered out a reply:

"No, not at all, my good captain, for this apparition seemed more like a celestial being, be she spirit or flesh."

"Strange, very strange, indeed," said Roscoe Rhymn, more to himself than in a tone intended for the ears of his companions; "and yet I was sure I saw a woman's face peering from some

willows at our boat, not long ago. I said nothing about it at the time, for fear—”

His speech was interrupted by the sudden appearance, on the bank opposite the boat, of one of the scouts sent ashore in advance of the raft. His great haste and violent gestures denoted great excitement, but it soon became evident that it was the excitement of triumph over a fallen foe, for at his girdle dangled a reeking Indian scalp.

“Shove over yer old skid and let me aboard,” the hunter yelled, tossing his scalp into the air; “swing in, boys, and let me aboard ole crawfish.”

The traders at once bent hard to the sweeps, and forced the cumbersome craft slowly in toward the shore. When it was about fifteen feet from the bank, the exultant scout gave a lofty spring, accompanied with a whoop, and landed squarely on the flat-boat.

“Whoop! by the rampin’ tigers o’ the Big Horn, boys!” he exclaimed, “ef I, Foghorn Phil, arn’t had a taste o’ Injin blood—pure, undefiled Si-ox blood! And thar’s the dockement that says so, too! Gor almighty, boys, we’re gorin’ to have a skrimshus ole time with the Si-oxes, an’ thar’s no tellin’ whar our ha’r’ll be in a week from now, for drat my ole cats if thar isn’t a Si-ox behind every tree along the river arter ye git a ways down to’rds the Milk.”

“Was it necessary for you to slay the owner of that scalp, Foghorn?” inquired the captain, eying the bloody trophy; “or did you kill him out of pure love for Indian blood?”

“Thunder, Cap, I couldn’t tell what I done it for, more than outen a natural instinct. You see I’ve been eddeccated to punch a red-skin wherever I got a squinter on ‘im, and ye know one must alers foller his trainin’. This yer red blood-guzzler kem prancin’ out o’ a clump o’ bushes afore the ole Foghorn o’ the Missouri, like as what he war gorin’ to chaw me right up, when up went my ole gun, and slam-bang went the Injin to grass, while a chunk o’ breath, in the shape o’ a yell, slipped out o’ his mouth, that I reckon they heard at the north pole. Then I secured the honeysuckle’s raven tresses, and lit out like two-forty on ther turnpike.”

“I am sorry that blood has been shed, as the Sioux will leave nothing undone to avenge it,” said Captain Rhymn, regretfully. “Have you seen Du Bush since he went over onto the other side of the river, Foghorn?”

“Have not, Cap,” replied Foghorn Phil, leaning forward, with his hands clasped over the muzzle of his rifle, and his chin resting upon his hands. “I hope the boy won’t git his poll shaved by the cussed Si-oxes.”

“I’m afraid he’s already in trouble,” replied Rhymn; “but what do you propose to do? Go on, or tie up?”

“Neither one, Cap; if we go on, we might run kerslap into a hull Satan’s mint o’ red-skins; and if we should swing in and tie up to the shore, they might board us at any time. Anchor in the middle o’ the river, say I, and then the varlets will have some swimmin’ to do afore they git to us.”

“But the river is too deep and the current too strong to anchor here with poles,” replied Captain Rhymn.

“Wal, then, I’ll tell ye,” said Foghorn Phil; “bout half a mile below here there’s an island what’s been made to-day by the river cuttin’ across a little pint o’ land. It’s not sich an awful safe place, for by mornin’ the island may be washed away. But I’ll bet the Injins’l not git to us, for all it isn’t over twenty foot from the left shore; but then thar’s a deep channel o’ water atwixt the island and land, and the current’s a reg’ler ole rip-staver; a sea-horse couldn’t stem it more’n I could a b’ar, hide and hair, tooth and nail. Wal, my ijee is to drap down to the island, tie up to her, and hang thar till our way is cl’ar. I’d jist as lief spend a few days slam-bangin’ Injins as not.”

“I second the ‘motion’,” added Colonel Aylesworth.

“And I, and me, and I,” responded the balance of the crew; whereupon the great boat was once more put under its slow, tedious way.

“It’s rather singular that we have had no report from Jake De Bush since he went ashore,” said the captain. “I am afraid he’s in trouble.”

“It mout be sech a thing, Cap,” replied Foghorn Phil, “but then a man o’ Jake Du Bush’s caliber ort to be able to take keer o’ his own hair, besides flip a few prides o’ Injin manhood. That thing that I see’d might a’ skeered the soul outen the boy.”

“What thing did you see?”

“A ghost, Cap, a ginewine ghost—a female phantom with a face—oh, ever so white. I see’d

the critter yesterday, and ‘d said somethin’ bout it, but didn’t want to be considered—”

“I dare say it was the same that I saw a few minutes ago,” said Aylesworth.

“Perhaps there is more reality about it than we think,” said Rhymn, in a tone that, to the colonel and young Bassett, scouted the idea of its being a phantom, while to the unsophisticated bordermen it seemed rife with superstitious apprehension.

Roscoe Rhymn was a man of some education, and his keen insight into human nature proved of great value to him in his present position. Foreseeing a future event that was likely to cause a diversity of opinion among his men, he was always prepared with a decision that would set aside all differences. He had entire control over his men. In fact, to Colonel Aylesworth, it seemed as though he controlled them with a mesmeric influence. On the subject of spirits, the borderman believes as strong in their existence as the more educated and orthodox do in the existence of a land beyond the grave. This Rhymn knew, and the colonel saw that he did not want him or Bassett to gainsay the whims of the trapper; for all, he afterward expressed a fear that the phantom of the river was some female spy in the service of the Milk River Traders.

“However,” the captain said to the crew, “I am going ashore to look after Du Bush myself, and will join you at the island. You need have no fears for me, boys, for I shall take care of my own hair.”

The party all looked for Foghorn Phil to object to the captain’s purpose, for while Rhymn was the chosen leader of the party, its safety and course of movements were virtually entrusted to the superior knowledge and experience of their scout, Foghorn Phil. In fact, Rhymn had only been chosen captain of the band, out of that respect which the uneducated are so apt to venerate in one their superior in intellectual talent; for all, he possessed but a tithe of border lore, compared with that of the dashing, fearless Foghorn Phil.

There were two canoes on board the flat-boat, and one of these was at once launched. Then one of the crew took the captain over to the shore, returning with the canoe as soon as Rhymn had landed. The latter then moved back into the woods and was soon lost to view of those on the raft.

“Cap Rhymn are an almighty slap-up good feller, boys,” said Phil, as though he regretted his departure, “but he’s a leetle too headstrong and pull-back ‘bout danger; and he’s got jist a taint of consait. The scrape of an Injin bullet across his head ‘ll cure him o’ that, fur we’ve got to have our eye-teeth cut afore we’ll listen to the voice o’ wisdom speakin’ thro’ age and experience. Mebby he’ll find Jake Du Bush, and mebby he won’t, for Jake’s a leetle skeery ‘bout spirits, and if he see’d that phantom, I’ll bet he’s at the north pole by now.”

“Do you think, Foghorn, that the cap’n would take the trubble to look fur us if we war missin’?”

The speaker was one of the oldest men in the party, who, from the stern, sober aspect of his bearded face, was called Judge Trout; and as he spoke, a tinge of sarcasm was noticed in his usually round, full voice.

“Ho! ho! Judge Trout!” laughed Foghorn Phil, “you’re gittin’ a leetle jealous o’ the cap’n’s favors, now hain’t you?—spit it right dab out.”

“No I arn’t, Phil,” replied Trout, soberly, “but he and Jake has lots of leetle secrets here of late to talk over privately, that don’t look jist right.”

“Be keerful, Judge Trout, and don’t insinuate too strong a’gin’ the captain; for a bigger and kinder heart never thumped human ribs than that same Roscoe Rhymn’s. I won’t stand and hear a friend abused ahind his back, no sir-ee, judge.”

“That’s the right talk, Foghorn!” cried a dozen voices.

“Bully for you, Foggy!” shouted Trout himself. “I war only testin’ your grip on the cap’n.”

All burst into a hearty peal of laughter, and what had seemed the beginning of dissension and mutiny, was soon forgotten in the enjoyment of one of Foghorn Phil’s side-splitting yarns, of which he possessed an inexhaustible store.

Suddenly the attention of the party was arrested by the appearance of Jake Du Bush on the bank of the river. He was alone, and expressed his desire to go aboard the raft, so a canoe was at once sent ashore after him.

On reaching the boat, Du Bush was questioned about Captain Rhymn and the result of

his reconnoissance. But to the surprise of the party, he reported that he had not seen the captain; and this, taken in connection with the report that hostile Indians were swarming along the river, gave the traders some serious apprehensions regarding the captain’s safety.

After the matter had been fully discussed, Judge Trout said:

“S’pose you sound your foghorn, Phil, and if the cap’n’s about, he’ll hussel this way, I’ll bet.”

“All right,” replied Phil, taking in a long breath, which seemed to inflate his whole form; then from his lips issued a prolonged shout, that a stranger, not knowing from whence the sound came, would have deemed it impossible to have issued from human lips.

Away back through the silent halls of the still old forest, rolled the startling sound. A hundred echoes caught it up and carried it on, to and fro among the hills in quavering, thrilling intonations.

“By Jupiter!” exclaimed Colonel Aylesworth, “no foghorn on earth could beat that shout, Phil.”

“Ho! ho! ho!” chuckled the scout, “that’s nothin’, colonel. If you’d hear one o’ my regular ole war-hoss screamers, you’d shake in yer boots.”

“Well, I have no desire to hear, then, but it is time the captain was responding.”

Scarcely had these words fallen from the colonel’s lips ere a little cloud of white smoke was seen to puff out from a clump of bushes on the north shore—the crack of a rifle split the air, and Aylesworth, with a cry of agony, staggered forward, clutching wildly at his brow, then, with a groan, sunk heavily to the deck—shot down by the hand of an unseen foe!

CHAPTER V.

RHYMM FOUND WOUNDED.

“God of mercy!” cried young Bassett, springing to the side of the fallen friend; “the colonel is killed!”

The clash of firearms was the only response to the young man’s excited words. Scarcely had Aylesworth fallen, ere every trapper and trader sprung to his rifle, and the next moment they fired into the bushes from whence had come the death-dealing missile that laid the colonel low.

The report of the rifles was immediately succeeded by a cry of agony issuing from the bushes, telling the traders that their random shots had not been fired without effect, and the next instant they saw a Sioux warrior, dressed and painted in all the hideous paraphernalia of the war-path, stagger from the bushes and fall lifeless to the earth, with his head hanging over the edge of the bank.

“By the ragin’ cats o’ the Big Horn!” exclaimed Foghorn Phil, “one hair o’ the young colonel’s head are avenged. One cussed varmint is sent to grass.”

“Boys!” exclaimed young Bassett, starting suddenly up, his face flushed with joy, “the colonel is not killed—only stunned by a bullet grazing his temple!”

“Then bandage it at once,” said Foghorn Phil, “and don’t be sparing o’ water on the wound, for the Missouri’s full o’ it. Bathe his head well, and keep down the fever, and arter awhile give him a ‘smile’ or two from our jug o’ ager preventative; and by the time he comes around, I’ll slide over and bring the scalp of that Injin for the colonel to take home to his lady-love. A ‘tarnal Injin that can’t shoot better’n that at that distance ort to be skinned alive.”

“It is a good thing for the colonel that he couldn’t shoot any truer,” said young Bassett.

“I know it, I know it,” replied the trapper-scout; “but then, for all that, it speaks bad for our western marksmen; I don’t keer if they are our enemies. Yousee I’m inclined to generosity, boys, as well as Injin ha’r,” and with a soft buckle at his own conceit, the scout sprung lightly into the canoe that was tied alongside the raft. “Now, boys,” he continued, “if any o’ you want to go with me, drap overboard here.”

Judge Trout and Jake Du Bush both sprung in with the scout, and then the three pulled out toward the shore.

By this time, Colonel Aylesworth manifested signs of speedily recovering consciousness, and by the time Foghorn Phil and his companions had reached the shore, he was enabled to rise to a sitting posture and inquire after his wound, its nature and extent.

In the mean time the three trappers had reached the point where they desired to land, and Phil and Du Bush had gone ashore and were creeping up the bank, leaving Trout to guard the boat.

The two had nearly gained the top of the

bank when a low moan fell upon their ears, coming from the clump of bushes before them. They knew it had not issued from the lips of the savage, for him they could see lying perfectly motionless, his body half-way out of the thicket and his head still hanging over the edge of the bank.

The trapper paused, for fear an attempt was being made to draw them into an ambuscade. Each bent his head and listened. They heard a slight rustling in the bushes before them, succeeded by another groan.

Then the scouts exchanged glances. Phil saw that Du Busk was greatly agitated.

"It's genuine, Foghorn," the latter remarked.

"Yes; and if I mistake not, it come from a white man's lips," replied Foghorn.

"My Go!" exclaimed Du Busk, as though a thought had suddenly occurred to him; "what if it is—"

Here he broke abruptly off and springing up the bank, plunged into the thicket. Then to Phil's ears came the startling exclamation:

"Great Heavens, Foghorn! we have killed the capt'in, too!"

Foghorn entered the thicket and found Du Busk bending over the form of Captain Rhymn, who lay upon the earth tossing in all the agonies of a dying man.

"Gor almighty, Jake, what does this mean?"

"The capt'in's shot—killed—is dying!" replied Du Busk, terribly agitated; "that volley intended for Aylesworth's assassin has done the ugly work for him. Lend a helpin' hand, Foghorn, and let's move him outen this thicket, whar that's more air."

The two lifted the unconscious man from the earth, and bore him tenderly from the thicket, and laid him on the grassy bank. Then Du Busk tore open the bosom of the wounded man's shirt, but not finding the wound there, he ripped open his right sleeve and laid bare the arm. Upon this limb he found a painful but not serious flesh wound. This, however, the scout knew was not the cause of his unconsciousness, and the presence of blood trickling out from among his raven locks of hair led to the discovery of a wound upon the head. A careful examination of this told him, to his joy, that it was not a mortal wound, though fears were entertained that it would, if it had not already, produce concussion of the brain. A bullet had traversed the right side of the head, plowing an ugly furrow to the skull. With a strip of the torn coat-sleeve Du Busk bandaged each wound as well as possible, and made ready to place the captain in the canoe and carry him to the flat-boat.

In the mean time, Foghorn Phil had turned aside and was examining the thicket in which both the captain and the Indian must have been, and that, too, close to each other, at the time the shots were fired by the traders into the thicket. Whether each one had been aware of the other's presence in the bushes at the time, was a matter Foghorn could not solve. From what he could ascertain, however, from observation, he was satisfied that not over five feet of shrubbery intervened between them at the time the ambush was fired into. It may have been possible, and to Phil seemed altogether probable, that the captain had entered the thicket first, and concealed himself there to watch the movements of the Indian, or to await the descent of the boat, and while thus engaged, the Indian crept into the thicket also, with the murderous intention of shooting one of the boat's crew.

Of course, in his opinion there could be no doubt as to who fired the almost fatal shot; yet Phil seemed unwilling to trust altogether to his own judgment in the matter, and turning, he picked up Captain Rhymn's rifle, examined the nipple, then drew out the ramrod and inserted it into the barrel. A smile of satisfaction passed over his bronzed face, and withdrawing the rod, he returned it to its guards. Then he proceeded to where the savage's rifle lay, and taking it up, made a similar examination.

"Blessed fact!" he exclaimed, in a tone intended for Du Busk's ears, though apparently to himself, "*the empty rifle tells who fired the shot at Colonel Aylesworth!*"

Du Busk started up and with a terrible expression upon his face, exclaimed:

"Which rifle is empty, Foghorn?—though in course it's the Injin's."

Foghorn Phil made no response, but turning, he entered the thicket where he was concealed from his companion's view, and then taking up his own rifle, fired it into the air. Then he remained in the bushes awhile, waiting for the smoke to clear out of the muzzle of the piece, while a strange smile swept over his face.

"I'll test him now," he mused, with a merry

twinkle in his keen eyes, "and carry both the Injin and captain's gun over to the boat for the inspection o' the hull crew."

Then he stepped out before Du Busk and said:

"Now, Jake, you crow on yer hearin', and knock o' distinguishin' sounds, so I reckon you can tell me whether that war or war not the crack o' the captain's gun?"

"It war the captain's, thank God," responded Du Busk, with an air of relief.

"I've no more to say," replied Phil, with a self-satisfied tone, and laying the three rifles aside, he assisted his companion to carry the wounded captain down to the canoe.

Then he returned for the rifles, but, to his surprise and astonishment, he found that both Rhymn's rifle and that of the Indian were gone; and in looking about for some clew to their sudden departure, he discovered, to his horror and amazement, that the supposed dead Indian warrior had also mysteriously disappeared!

Like a hound freed from the leash, the old scout bounded away into the woods in search of the cunning foe.

CHAPTER VI.

HUMAN BADGERS.

FOGHORN PHIL did not extend his search for the savage far from the river, for, when his rage had cooled off somewhat, he saw that his efforts would be fruitless, and might lead him into unknown danger. So he retraced his steps to the river, cursing his stupidity for not having secured the savage's scalp the moment he and Du Busk had landed. After all was said and done, however, he did not care so much for the red-skin's escape, nor the twitting he was likely to get from his friends in consequence, but the loss of the two rifles proved the source of the greatest regret and disappointment, for with one of those rifles was a secret, which he wished to divulge as soon as he reached the boat.

To attempt this now, without the evidence to sustain him, would doubtless provoke a shower of calumny down upon his head, and, so, for the time being, he dismissed the matter from his mind, deciding at once upon another course of action.

The three scouts at once returned with the wounded captain to the flat-boat, and everything within the power of the crew was done to alleviate the man's suffering. And none were more devoted in their assiduities than was Colonel Aylesworth, who had by this time so far recovered from his shock as to be enabled to be on his feet.

When the captain did begin to revive, his recovery was quite rapid, and to the happy surprise of all, he was soon on his feet, directing the movements of the party, and discussing the subject of the late narrow escape of himself and the colonel. The statement of his position, and that of the Indian in the thicket, at the time of being wounded, accorded exactly with the supposition of Foghorn Phil. He had ensconced himself in the thicket to await the coming of the boat to get aboard, unaware of there being a savage in the bushes within ten feet of him, until the wily foe had fired the almost fatal shot at the colonel. Then, before he could fully recover from his consternation, came the rattling volley from the flat-boat, and he was stricken down by the bullets of his own friends.

The captain's story was listened to in breathless silence, and when he had concluded, a shout of joy went up from the lips of the crew. Then the two wounded men were congratulated upon their miraculous escapes, when the joke turned on Foghorn Phil and Jake Du Busk, for having permitted the "dead" Indian to escape with his hair and the captain's rifle. The scouts, however, took the matter coolly, and so, for a while, all dangers were forgotten.

At length the boat swept around an abrupt bend in the river, and the little island for which they were aiming, appeared in sight but a few rods in advance. This island, as Foghorn Phil had stated, was but a day old. The mad, swift waters, rushing around the bend of the river above, had carried the current in against the bank below; and the bank, all at once having yielded to the strong force rushing against it, had been dug away and eaten into, as it were, by the water, which, in a single day, broke across the base of a little peninsula, leaving the point standing out in the river, an island.

And this island, as the scout had said, was liable to be swept away in a single night, for the water had already dug far in under its edges, over which a perfect network of bare roots and vines trailed in the water below, preventing the crew from seeing how far under the island the water had washed.

In area, the island was scarcely the tenth of an acre, being long and narrow, the length being with the course of the stream. It was covered with a dense growth of bushes and shrubbery, whose thick, matted roots defied, to some extent, the force of the water. The river to the right of the island was about sixty rods wide, while at the left it was not over two rods. But the current in the channel was so swift that no canoe could cross it.

By the skillful management of Foghorn Phil, the flat-boat was run alongside of the island and held there until it was tied up. Then the whole crew landed and began an inspection of the spot. It was found to be an admirable camping-place, and yet, while it was almost unapproachable by a foot, owing to the swiftness of the water on one side, and the width on the other, it could be reached otherwise than by water. This was by means of a long, slender cottonwood tree, which had toppled over from the mainland shore, and lodged in the crotch of a low, scrubby tree on the island. Thus the channel between the mainland and the island was bridged by the tree, though the latter lay at an inclination of about forty-five degrees, which would require some care to cross upon it; then, when the tree in which it was lodged was reached, it was all of fifteen feet to the ground below. Still, an Indian could easily crawl along this log from the shore and drop himself to the island, but as only one at a time could descend, the scouts had no fears from this source; but, for all this, they did not intend to leave it unguarded.

The sun had now set, and the shadows of evening were lengthening over the river and deepening in the forest, and so dispositions were at once made for the night. Foghorn Phil and Dick Trout were sent ashore to reconnoiter the surrounding. Jake Du Busk was taken over to the mainland and stationed at the foot of the leaning tree, to guard this approach to the island.

Supper of dried venison and roasted buffalo-rib was partaken of, after which the party threw themselves upon the earth in attitudes of ease and repose, to smoke and "spin their yarns," the usual evening pastime of the trapper and hunter.

Captain Rhymn was still suffering from his wounds, and took little part in the stories and jokes of his men. A couch of skins had been prepared for him, and upon this he sought rest and repose. Colonel Aylesworth, however, was lively as ever and contributed his share to the entertainments of the hour.

Foghorn Phil and the "judge" returned shortly after dark and reported that no Indians were to be found in the vicinity, though traces of their having been around quite recently were found all along the river. Many of the less-experienced hunters rejoiced over this sudden disappearance of the enemy, but Foghorn Phil did not, for the act itself led him to suspect some demonstration from the Indians that they were not calculating upon. However, he expected no trouble that night. He knew the savages could have had no intimation, nor idea beforehand, that they intended to spend the night on that island; and he was fully satisfied, that, if the foe had set a trap for them, it was further down the river. Thus arguing, he put the minds of his friends at ease, and all, with the exception of a single guard, wrapped their blankets around them and seeking comfortable quarters, lay down to sleep.

The night was not very dark, for there was a moon, although the shadows of the trees that fringed the shore shut out its rays from the island. On the south side of the bivouac rolled the turbid, moonlit river, while on the north side, the grim, black woods rose up like the wall of some old battlement.

All were soon wrapped in slumber, excepting Foghorn Phil. After he had lain down, he got to thinking over the events of the day, and the more he thought of them, the more uneasy and restless he became. He tried to dismiss them from his mind and go to sleep, but the sound of the swift, rushing waters around the island would fill his mind with vague fancies of stealthy, rushing footsteps creeping upon his sleeping companions. And thus he turned in vain for an hour to sleep.

Suddenly he started up from his couch, and leaning upon his elbow gazed down at the earth where his hand had lain as though a serpent had hissed in his ear. He had detected a strange, dull sound, or vibratory shock, so delicate was it, that he could not tell which. At first it seemed like the purring of a cat accompanied by a slight thumping jar. What it was he could not form the faintest conception, and to add to his surprise, the sound ceased the mo-

ment he raised his head from the ground. He examined the place where his head had lain, but found nothing—not even an insect of the earth. He extended his search for several yards around him, but finding nothing, he came to the conclusion that he was growing nervous—that all was mere fancy, and so he again laid down. But to his surprise, the instant he did so that strange, unaccountable thud and dull purring sound was at once resumed—more distinct than when he had first heard it.

For once in his eventful life, Foghorn Phil was completely bewildered—dumbfounded. He could not tell what the sound was, or from whence it came. But he was not the man to give up, and so he put his wits to work, determined to fathom the mystery, if such a thing was possible. When he again raised his head from the earth the noise subsided, but as soon as he laid down, it was resumed. These facts let in a ray of light, as the scout believed, on the mystery: and he began to theorize upon it, and soon arrived at a satisfactory solution of the matter, as he believed. The noise he attributed to the violent rush of the water against the island, which conducted the sound with a slight jar to his ears. Upon this, he finally settled down, and stretched himself upon the earth again. But to his amazement, the instant his ear came in contact with the earth, he discovered that that strange sound had increased—was growing plainer and was approaching so close that it assumed a distinctiveness that left no grounds for mental speculation; and, with a low, involuntary exclamation, Phil sprung to his feet, and, like one bewildered, stood scratching his head as if for some new idea. Meanwhile, he gazed around him, then down at the earth, as though he had suddenly been apprised of some new facts. And so he had, and his thoughts found expression in the startling exclamation:

"Gar almighty, is it possible?"

"What, Foghorn?—is what possible?"

It was Colonel Aylesworth who had approached unobserved and overheard the scout's words.

"Ay! it's you colonel," the scout replied, his breath coming quick and hard; "but do you know that Satan's at work?"

"What do you mean, Phil; are we in danger?"

"Danger's no name for it, colonel."

"Explain yourself; don't keep a fellow in suspense."

"Come out here," he replied, plucking the colonel to one side. "Now, colonel," he began, "you know the banks o' this is washed under, don't you?"

"Yes; I noticed that."

"And ye also noticed the roots and vines that hang around the edge of the island like fringe, didn't ye?"

"I did, and remarked about the lacework of bare roots and parasites."

"Just so; then did it ever occur to yer mind, colonel, that in under that bank, and behind that curtain of roots, a hundred Si-ox Injins war concealed?"

"It has not; such a thing is impossible," replied the colonel, strangely impressed by the tone and action of his companion.

"Nothin' devilish is impossible for a red-skin, colonel; and my life on it, that's Injins enuff at this blessed minit, concealed under the edge of this island to eat us all, tooth and nail, hide and hair! And now if you'll lay down whar I did, and put your ear to the earth, ye can hear 'em under the island diggin like badgers. You can hear every lick of their knives, as that's what their diggin' with, I know; and you can hear the dirt rattlin' down jist as plain as you can hear the thunder. You see they're diggin up through the island in a dozen places, and all will aim to git thro' bout the same time, then up they'll rush, an' Lor' what a time! You see, the devils are under that, and can't git onto the island by comin' out and climbin' over the bank—it's too high—no, they're tunnelin' up thro'!"

"Do you have any idea how many there are under the bank?—do you know there are any at all there?" asked Aylesworth.

"In course that are Injins that, tho' I never see'd one o' them; and it stands to reason that if they are there, they're there for a purpose; and that purpose is our massacre; and if one's that, I'll bet that's enuff that to wallop thunder outen us if they git half a chance."

"If such is the case, Phil, how does it come that they are there?"

"Which, colonel?"

"I mean how did the Indians know so well that we were going to encamp here, for I sup-

pose, of course, they were here before we came?"

"Now, you're comin' at the p'int, colonel; the wust is to be told: that's a cussed traitor in our crew that's told the red devils we war goin' to land here!"

"Good heavens, Phil! is this true?"

"Yas, colonel; and who would you guess that traitor war?"

Before the colonel could reply, there came a dull thump—a sound like that made by the fall of a heavy body on the earth. No other sound, however, followed it, and they were about to resume their conversation, when the keen, cat-like eyes of Foghorn Phil caught the dusky outlines of a human form swing off from the leaning tree overhead, and drop with scarcely a sound, to the earth.

"Easy, colonel, for heaven's sake! The red devils are droppin' from the clouds, and comin' up from the inferno to butcher us alive!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE FALSE GUIDE'S TREACHERY.

On the same evening that the events just narrated occurred, a little steamer cast anchor in the Missouri river, some forty miles below the island upon which the Big Horn Traders were encamped. The boat had just come up from Fort Union with a party of excursionists. It had arrived at the fort, the day previous, with Government supplies, and upon the earnest solicitation of a number of gentlemen and ladies who were spending the summer at the fort with friends in the army the captain had consented to carry them a day's journey up the river on a pleasure excursion.

The party numbered some fifty persons, including the boat's crew and a squad of soldiers. There were half a score of ladies, among whom was the beautiful and lovely Miss Pauline Afton, niece of the commandant of Fort Union, who had been spending the summer in her uncle's family at the fort. She was one of those fairy-like little brunettes whose every look has a charm in it, and whose every word and smile have the ripple of music. She was about eighteen years of age, with a *petite* figure, beautifully developed in every feature of womanhood. Her pretty face was framed in with a wealth of dark ringlets, and her bright, black eyes, with their long, silken lashes sparkled with all the blithesome gayety of her young soul.

Her presence at the fort had been a source of great pleasure to those who were compelled to undergo the dull routine of military duty, for it led to the cultivation of those manly principles due to the society of ladies, and kept awake all those refined emotions of the heart that are so apt to grow dormant in rude society. She had scores of admirers who were ready to bow at the altar of her love, but, while she manifested that same kind spirit to all, only one had made an impression on her heart, and that was Colonel Aylesworth. To him had she plighted her love and poured into his heart the music of her own soul.

Pauline was as brave as she was beautiful. There were no dangers that she feared, and she took pleasure in those delightful exercises that weaker women would have pronounced unmaidenly. Being a splendid equestrienne as well as a capital shot with rifle or revolver, she frequently accompanied her uncle on hunting and scouting expeditions, betraying no fear nor fatigue.

The excursionists had brought ample supplies for several days pic-nicking; a number of ponies and horses with equipments, had also been brought, for a ride into the buffalo country to the north, and on the day following a party was fitted out for this purpose.

Pauline Afton and Miss Josephine Markham, a lovely and vivacious girl of Pauline's own age, were to accompany the party. Miss Markham had a brother in the hunting party, and under his protection the maidens placed themselves, for it was by his solicitation that they had consented to go along.

When the party was made up, a leader, who was acquainted with the country and the range of buffalo was to be selected before starting off. This duty devolved upon the young man who had been instrumental in getting up the party, by name, Alfonso De Ramee. He was a man of some five-and-twenty years, and of Spanish descent. This his dark hair and complexion and his fine blue eyes indicated, although he spoke the English language perfectly. In form he was of medium height, and possessed a military air and movement and a pleasant, yet free and dashng spirit, given somewhat to eccentricity, as was portrayed in his long hair worn down upon his back, and the peculiar style and finish of his

dress. But, altogether in his Adonis-like form and features, his graceful mien and elegant language, he was a lady's man, and all courted his society with that feminine admiration that gallantry in man begets in woman.

Mr. De Ramee's only object in the country seemed to be his extraordinary love of sport and adventure. He made Fort Union his headquarters, coming and going at pleasure, and living even there upon the frontier, in a style that was indicative of an inexhaustible source of wealth.

When the company of hunters was at last organized, the command was given, and amid the shouts of those on the boat's deck, the little party galloped away, Alfonso De Ramee and Miss Markham, and Mr. Charles Markham and Pauline Afton taking the lead.

It was a little after noon when the party left the river, but as it was not over an hour or two's sharp riding to the buffalo country, they calculated to be back to the boat by sunset.

All mounted upon fresh, spirited animals, they galloped on quite briskly, a cloud of dust hanging just above the earth, marking their trail for miles over the great plain.

"I say, Captain De Ramee," said young Markham, when fairly under way, his enthusiasm awakened by the cool, fragrant air, the grand sea of prairie opening around them, and the thunderous tramp of their flying animals' feet, "this promises to be a day of real pleasure."

"It does, indeed, Markham," replied De Ramee, with a wave of his gloved hand, "and if we should be so fortunate as to find one of those vast herds of buffalo, the sight will amply repay the ladies for their ride."

"But will it not repay you, also, Mr. De Ramee?" asked pretty Miss Markham.

"Oh, bless me, Miss Josie!" exclaimed the enthusiastic De Ramee, "your company will more than repay me for my ride, I can assure you."

"But if we should accidentally run across a war-party of hostile Indians, instead of buffalo, we might have cause to regret our adventure," replied Miss Markham.

"Now don't, I beg you, Miss Markham," persisted De Ramee, "don't give yourself uneasiness about such an impossible thing, when I assure you there is not a Sioux within thirty leagues of here. Dismiss the thought from your mind, and be resolved to enjoy this ride as only the charming Misses Markham and Afton could enjoy such a glorious landscape as that," and he waved his hand away toward the billowy ocean of verdure before and around them.

"You are flattering in your compliments and eloquent in your enthusiasm, Mr. De Ramee," replied Josie, glancing away before her, her cheeks flushed with excitement, and her pretty blue eyes sparkling with a joy she could not express.

So far, Pauline Afton had been unusually silent for one of her vivacious spirit. Her thoughts seemed to be far away, and her heart set upon something else than the pleasures of that ride. Her silence finally called forth this remark from Josie:

"Pauline, you must be speechlessly enchanted with the pleasures of this ride and the beauties of the prairies. Or, are your thoughts off up the Missouri with Captain Rhymm's fur-traders?"

"Why, Josie, I assure you I speak whenever occasion demands," replied Pauline, in her usual musical voice. But in her reply she evaded the truth—an affirmative answer to Josephine's question, for at the time her thoughts were upon Colonel Aylesworth, her affianced lover, whose return had been expected for several days, with many misgivings in consequence of the prolonged absence. However, in order that her own indifference might not mar the pleasure of the occasion, she at once opened a play of words with Josie and her gallant and charming escort. In this manner they rode until what had at first seemed like a couple of small clouds hanging low on the horizon, began to assume a more material and distinct form, when Josephine Markham changed the subject by exclaiming:

"Oh, dear, look yonder! Those objects must be two small mountains, Mr. De Ramee!"

"Yes, they are the Two Buttes, Miss Markham," replied De Ramee, "and near their base we will find buffalo, if we find them at all."

"Or, the Sioux," added Pauline Afton.

Alfonso De Ramee turned quickly in his saddle, and glanced a little strangely and inquiringly at Pauline, for there was a depth of earnestness in her tone that seemed to give the young man some uneasiness.

"You ladies, surely, are not apprehensive of danger, are you?" he asked, while a soft, pleasant laugh escaped his lips.

"Oh, not at all, Mr. De Ramee," replied Pauline, in a matter of fact, intended to set the subject at rest. And so it did, and another matter at once sprung up for discussion, and lasted until De Ramee finally drew rein and halted the party.

He then informed them that they were in the immediate vicinity of the Two Buttes, near which the buffalo usually fed; and that the greatest precaution would have to be observed as they were to the windward of the buttes.

"I will go now, myself, and reconnoiter the plain, and see whether or not there are any buffalo about in the valley, and, if so, their position."

As he concluded, he turned and rode to the summit of a hill about half a mile away, from which he could command a long view of plain. When he returned, he bore the exciting news that a mighty herd of buffalo were feeding on the plain about two miles to the northward.

"But won't they take the alarm before we can get within a mile of them, De Ramee?" asked one of the party.

"Certainly, if we attempt to ride down the wind upon them. If we get any game, the main force has got to strike to the right, gallop around to the leeward of the herd and conceal themselves in the hollows and behind the hills; then, one or two can remain here and drive the herd down toward the party as soon as it has gained a position. I would suggest that the ladies remain here with whoever stays back, and ride down upon the buffalo with him. By so doing, they will be exposed to no danger, and, in the meantime, have a better view of the grand spectacle of the chase."

As the party were eager for the sport to begin, and as none were willing to be debarred from the chance of killing a buffalo by remaining behind to drive the beasts, De Ramee, out of courtesy to their desires, consented to remain behind with the maidens, and with them ride down upon the herd. This point settled, the party took its departure, De Ramee and the girls remaining upon the plain until it could have time to take up a position to the leeward.

An hour was the specified time given the party to take their position. De Ramee spent the time in pleasant conversation with the maidens, and when the hour was up, the three galloped forward toward the herd of buffalo. They succeeded in getting within half a mile of it before the animals took the alarm. But when the sentinels gave the warning, there was a sudden closing up of that sea of shaggy forms; then a sound like the dull rumble of thunder rolled along the earth, and the buffalo were gone, pell-mell, in wild confusion over the great plain, a perfect continent of dust rising from their trail. On and on rushed the frightened mass, rising and falling with the undulations of the plain like the waves of the sea.

"Now," said De Ramee, when the buffalo were fully under way, "let us not follow them through that cloud of suffocating dust, but keep to the left and pass west around the Two Buttes; and then we will be enabled to see the closing scene, for the men will head them off, and turn them in toward the west; and by gaining a spur of yonder hills we can command a view of the plain."

With flushed cheeks and eyes sparkling with excitement, the maidens galloped on with the young man, one on each side of him. It was over half a mile to the hills, and all this distance was made in comparative silence. De Ramee kept his eyes fixed ahead of him as though his thoughts were far away. At times, however, a strange light would flash in his fine, dark eyes, then he would glance quickly around him as though he were apprehensive of danger. All this did not escape the notice of the maidens, yet they were at a loss to know the cause of his apparent nervousness. Pauline believed there was some danger about, of which he was cognizant, and was trying to keep the fact concealed from them.

The spur of the hill referred to was finally reached, but to the surprise of the maidens, De Ramee spurred on, and when questioned as to where they would draw rein, replied:

"Wherever we can command a fair view of the hunting-party, Miss Afton. I think now, that from the edge of yon strip of woods we can have the desired view."

He pointed on ahead to where a wooded ridge rose clear against the sky, about a mile distant.

Pauline and Josephine exchanged glances in which a shadow of disappointment was visible, but they rode on in comparative silence. They had nearly reached the wood in question, when a large covey of quails started up with a frightened whir directly under their animals' feet.

The beasts became frightened by the noise, and began to rear and plunge in a manner that endangered the lives of the maidens. But with great presence of mind, De Ramee reached over and caught Pauline's horse by the reins and checked its flight; then spurring alongside of Josie's animal, he stayed its flight in a similar manner.

"Well done, Mr. De Ramee," cried Pauline, in a tone of no little excitement.

"Thanks for the compliment, Miss Afton," replied De Ramee. "We could ill afford to have a runaway now."

"It was quite a scare, I assure you," said Josie, with an air of relief; "and to Mr. De Ramee we are indebted for his prompt action."

"Not at all, Miss Markham; your brother intrusted you both to my care, and I assure you, it affords me great pleasure to be enabled to serve you," replied the young gallant.

"We were fortunate in having been intrusted to your companionship, Mr. De Ramee," replied Pauline, her dark eyes sparkling with joy.

At this juncture the trio reached the edge of the timber, and, as a matter of course, the maidens expected to stop, but De Ramee, who still held the reins of both animals, said:

"We had better not stop here, ladies," and with a word or two sharply spoken to the three horses, they dashed into the timber.

"I thought we were to stop here, Mr. De Ramee," said Pauline, a tinge of disappointment in her voice.

De Ramee made no reply, but a faint smile, that sent a chill to the hearts of the girls, swept over his face. His whole aspect seemed suddenly transformed; his features assumed a hard, cruel expression, while his eyes grew dull and furtive, as if from the consciousness of guilt.

A sudden thought flashed into Pauline's quick, perceptive mind, the instant she saw this change in the man's features. No words could have stung her deeper to the heart than those looks. All the indignities of her woman nature were aroused, and as her face grew a shade paler, and her dark eyes flashed with a wild fire, she said:

"Mr. De Ramee, I protest against you taking us further, and I beg you will release my horse's reins!"

"In a minute, Pauline," he replied, in a tone indifferent to her demand, yet freighted with a volume of secret meaning.

"Alfonso De Ramee!" cried Pauline, throwing all the scorn of her nature into the words, "you are deceiving us. You are not what you have pretended to be—a gentleman—else you would explain your present course! You are a base villain and hypocrite, and I demand that you release my horse, sir," and all the fire of her imperious nature blazed in her dark eyes, while her right hand dropped, as if helplessly, at her side.

The next instant they debouched from the narrow strip of timber into the open plain, and down in a little valley not over two hundred yards away, a sight met the eyes of the maidens that sent a chill of horror to their young hearts. It was a band of Sioux warriors, in war-paint, mounted and drawn up in line, facing up the valley, as if awaiting the approach of the three—De Ramee and the maidens!

"Oh, Mr. De Ramee!" cried Josie Markham, "see!—we are riding toward a band of Indians!"

"I know it, my dear, and have for the last hour," replied De Ramee, the demoniac triumph of a glozing fiend transforming his hitherto handsome face. "Ha! ha! ha!" the demon laughed, "this is a pretty surprise, my girls! and you, Miss Pauline, will be mine to love and wed, and you, Miss Josie!"

He did not finish the sentence, for quick as a flash, Pauline thrust her hand forward toward the head of De Ramee's horse with a tiny silver-mounted revolver clasped in her fingers.

Then followed the sharp crack of a pistol, a wild neigh, and the traitorous villain's horse plunged forward and fell dead, shot through the head!

De Ramee's grasp was broken upon the reins of the maiden's horse, and he thrown violently forward upon the earth a rod in advance of his fallen horse.

A yell burst from the lips of the savages who had witnessed this scene, and then with the speed of the wind, they came charging up the valley.

"Now, dear Josie," said Pauline, hastily returning her revolver to the receptacle where she had all the time kept it concealed, at the same time turning her animal's head southward; "let us flee, for the Indians are coming! And now good-by, my gallant De Ramee," and she waved her little hand back in bold defiance at

the outwitted villain who, by this time, had scrambled to his feet, cursing and fuming with impotent rage.

"Oh, Paulie!" cried Josephine in terror, "the Indians are coming in pursuit of us! We will be killed before we can reach our friends!"

"Cheer up, dear Josie, and ride, ride for your life," replied the brave and peerless Pauline, as they dashed away over the plain, closely pursued by that screaming, yelling horde of savage barbarians.

It was a wild and fearful race—a race for life!

CHAPTER VIII.

THOSE ORBS OF FIRE.

ON over the plain went the two fair girls, while on, in swift pursuit, went that band of infuriated savages.

Ever and anon the fugitives glanced back over their shoulders to see how close the foe were upon them, then urged on their beasts with words of encouragement. Their course lay toward the south-west, and in a direction that took them further and further from their friends at each step. But there was no alternative. To bear off toward the Two Buttes would be to give the foe an advantage that might prove fatal. Their only hope lay in the speed of their animals; but in this, even, the enemy had the advantage, for while their ponies were fresh, the maidens' horses were somewhat jaded with their day's ride.

"Oh, Paulie!" cried Josephine when they had ridden some distance, "I am afraid there is no hope for us; the enemy are gaining upon us!"

"We can but do our best, Josie, trusting to Heaven for aid. If we could only bear to the left, we might join our friends, from whom the shrewd and deceitful wretch De Ramee had us separated. Oh, that we had seen through his devilish designs sooner! He has been working up this snare for us all summer, and so well has he played his cards that not one has suspected him of wrong; and I now almost wish I had put a bullet through his heart, instead of the heart of his poor beast."

"Oh, Paulie, you are a perfect heroine," replied Josephine; "your presence of mind, and the manner in which you defeated that villain, deserves great credit. I did not think of you having your revolver until you drew—Oh! those horrible screams!"

"If I mistake not, Josie, De Ramee is mounted upon one of the Indians' horses, and is at the head of the pursuers. If we are ever taken prisoners by him, our fate will be worse than death; and so we must not think otherwise, than that we will escape—oh, my God, Josie, we must escape!"

With blanched cheeks, compressed lips and wild, starting eyes, the fugitives urged their animals on. Josie's hat had blown from her head, and her long golden hair was streaming in disheveled tresses at her back. Pauline, firm and undaunted, sat on her horse like a perfect queen, ever and anon glancing back at the pursuing foe, a faint smile of derision passing over her face.

The beautiful fugitives gained but little if any upon their fierce, savage pursuers, and for two long, weary hours the race continued on over the plain, beneath the hot, sultry sun. The maidens were well enough acquainted with the topography of the country to know that if they kept on in their present course, they would strike the Milk river, not far from its confluence with the Missouri. They also knew that unless they eluded the foe before the stream was reached, all chances of escape would be cut off.

At length the sun went down behind the distant snow-capped peaks of the great Rocky Mountains, and a gloomy twilight settled over the plain. Still the race continued, but for the last hour the pursuers had been gaining ground; but the timber bordering the Milk river had long been in view, and upon this the fugitives fixed their sole hopes of escape.

"I believe we will reach the timber yet, Josie, before we are overtaken," said Pauline, her voice growing stronger with hope.

"But when there, what can we do among the shadows of night? Oh, Paulie! we are certainly doomed to a night of agony, if not death!"

It was plain to Pauline that her companion's strength was fast failing. Her trembling voice, pale face, languid eyes and white, quivering lips told this. But Pauline herself still maintained her unflinching courage and hopeful spirit, and was always ready with words of cheer for her young friend.

With a murmured prayer of thanks, the fugitives at length reached the edge of the timber. Without a moment's hesitation they plunge into

its gloomy shadows, and ride on and on until a broad sheen of dazzling light suddenly bursts out of the darkness before them. Then they draw rein. They can go no further; they are upon the banks of the Milk river, and not far away behind them they can hear the approaching noise of the pursuers.

"We are lost, Pauline!" cried Josie.

"No, dear Josie; we can continue on down the river," replied Pauline, and suiting the action to the word, turned her animal downstream.

As they rode on as fast as the darkness and the obstruction of the forest would permit, Pauline's mind was busily engaged with thoughts of eluding the foe. The failing strength of Josie, as well as that of their horses, convinced her that they could travel but a little way further; and the longer they stuck to their animals the greater their danger became.

"Josie," she at length said, "we have got to give up our horses and seek safety on foot; and my opinion is that we had better do it now while our animals have remaining strength enough to go on, and then when the savages do catch them, they can not tell in the darkness where we gave them up. My idea is, to climb into a tree from their backs, and when the Indians pass on, we can get down and make our way down the river. Rein up, Josie; here is the very tree for our purpose—the boughs are low and strong."

Under a tree with great spreading boughs, they came to a halt; then reaching up they caught hold of a limb and steadied themselves while they drew up, erect, into the saddles.

This accomplished, they were within easy reach of a great, gnarled bough upon which they immediately climbed from the backs of their animals. Then securely seating themselves where the foliage of the tree would conceal them from view, each one reached down and gave her animal a severe cut with her riding-whip; and now that the horses were free of their burden, and startled by the stinging blows, they darted away through the woods with renewed strength.

In breathless silence the maidens now listen. Clear and distinct upon the silent night comes the voice of the foe, crashing through the woods in hot pursuit. They are following the maidens' trail by sound.

The maidens can now hear the voice of the enraged De Ramee urging on the savages, its tones of authority coupled with vile and horrible execrations. They are coming nearer and nearer—now they are directly under the fugitives who hold their breath lest it betray their presence. They peer down through the foliage, and they see the dim outlines of grim warriors, and they can feel their nodding plumes brush athwart the foliage in which their feet are concealed. But all this passes in an instant, and the foe are gone—on down the river in pursuit of the riderless horses.

Pauline now leaned forward and whispered to her companion:

"Thank God, Josie, we have eluded them."

"But they may soon overtake our horses, and finding them riderless, come back and hunt us down," replied Josie.

"The darkness is now in our favor, and we can soon climb down from here and then follow the river down to the Missouri—thence on down toward the steamer.

"Pauline, we can never make the trip without something to eat to give us strength. You remember they said on the boat that it was thirty miles to the mouth of the Milk river from the steamer. I am now almost faint with hunger and exhaustion."

"But, Josie, I have a faint hope that we will fall in with Captain Rhymn's Big Horn Traders. You know they have been expected daily, for fully a week. I also feel certain our own friends will hasten to our aid as soon as they find we are missing."

"Yes, I know dear brother will not rest a moment after he finds we are missing. But here is the trouble: when they get through with the buffalo chase, the chances are that they will return to the steamer when they find we are gone, with the belief that De Ramee had taken us back there. If so, we need not expect our friends along soon. They may never come, for that traitorous villain may have a trap set for them."

"Let us live in hopes of the best, Josie; let us look on the bright side—'Sl! did you move then, Josie?' she asked, in a soft whisper.

"I did not, Paulie," Josephine replied, creeping closer to her companion and placing her arm about her waist, as though she felt secure in being nearer her.

"I was sure I heard, or rather felt something

move in the tree," replied Pauline, placing her lips close to Josie's ear.

"Let us listen a moment," said the latter.

In breathless silence they sat and listened—listened till the beating of their own hearts seemed tumultuous.

Then suddenly a slight tremor thrilled the lith form of Josie Markham, and leaning over to Pauline, she whispered:

"Did you hear that, Paulie?"

"I thought I heard a sound resembling the subdued breathing of a person," replied Pauline.

"I am sure I did, Pauline; and it seemed to be in this tree directly before us. My Lord, Pauline! what if it is a panther or a savage?"

"I have my revolver, Josie, with five loaded chambers; and upon this we can make some reliance if it should be an Indian, but—ah! hist!"

They bend their heads and listen. They can hear that suppressed breathing again, and there is no mistaking the evidence of their hearing now. Something or some one possessed of life was concealed before them in the dense, dark drapery of the tree. They could hear the low, yet regular respirations of the unknown which seems to be coming nearer and nearer to them as drawn by the fascination of their gaze. Suddenly the poor young creatures see a pair of dull, glowing orbs appear from the black depths of the shrubbery before them, and back of these they can see a round, black, hairy object. What it is, they can not tell; but they can see that those fiery orbs are coming closer and closer, and now may God protect them, for they can feel the hot, fetid breath of the unknown upon their blanched, terrified faces!

CHAPTER IX.

AFFAIRS AT THE ISLAND.

WE will now return and look after the Big Horn Traders whom we left on the island in the Missouri, in imminent peril.

Foghorn Phil and Colonel Aylesworth did not wait for a third figure to drop "from the clouds," as the scout expressed it, but pushed their way boldly across the island toward their sleeping comrades.

The two unknown intruders vanished in an instant when the heavy, unguarded footsteps of Phil were heard. Where they went to, the scout did not see, nor was it his intention to search them out before he had aroused his companions.

Phil was soon among the prostrate forms of the traders, all of whom were rolled up in blankets and buffalo-robés. Bending over one of the sleepers, he was about to wake him, when, to his surprise and indignation, he discovered it was the form of an Indian!

A moment's reflection told him how the savage had got there. He was one of the two he had seen drop from the leaning tree, and to elude discovery while others were coming the cunning knave had thrown himself, wrapt in a blanket, on the ground among the traders, doubtless supposing that the boldness of the act would not be suspected, and his form would be overlooked as one of the traders.

Phil straightened up and drew his long hunting-knife half from its sheath, but upon a second thought he returned the blade to its keeping. He resolved to make further investigations before he raised an alarm that might precipitate unknown dangers upon them. He searched among the sleepers and soon found the form of the other savage laying near the couch of Captain Rhymn.

This discovery led him to believe that other savages were expected upon the island by the same way. If so, where was Jake Du Busk, who had been placed on shore to guard this leaning tree—the only access to the island, except by canoes? The scout asked himself this question, and answered it thus: Du Busk had either been slain, or spirited away by the foe, who were to co-operate with those under the banks of the island.

Having made known his fears to the colonel, and having requested him to watch the two Indians already on the island, Foghorn Phil entered one of their canoes and went ashore, landing some distance above the island. He then stole down near the foot of the leaning tree, and found that his worst fears were only too truly realized: Du Busk was gone! But near the foot of the tree he could see two or three shadowy forms standing; and he could see they were savages, who were, no doubt, waiting an opportunity to crawl up the tree and drop themselves onto the island. This the scout resolved to prevent at all hazards.

The darkness was so intense that one form could not distinguish another, unless in the ex-

act position occupied by the scout. He was lying flat upon the earth, and could see the Indians distinctly outlined against the sky through an opening in the tree-tops directly in range.

For several minutes Phil lay perfectly quiet, waiting an opportunity to do something. At length he saw one of the Indians part from his companions, and come directly toward him. The scout's first thought was that he had been discovered, and at once placed himself in an attitude of defense. But to his happy disappointment, the Indian stole apart him and went on up the river. Phil arose and followed him.

The savage went on about three rods, then crept down to the water's edge, and gazed steadily for some time down toward the island. Phil, being close at hand, watched his movements narrowly. He knew the Indian was watching for something at the island, and so he watched to see what it was. All at once he saw a quick flash like that of a fire-fly, in under the bank of the island, and he knew at once that this was what the savage was looking for, for he at once turned and began to retrace his steps down the river. But his way was disputed. The great, bony fingers of Foghorn Phil closed suddenly upon his throat.

Then followed the sound of a slight struggle, that dull crunch of a knife driven into a throbbing heart, the fall of a heavy body; and an instant after, all was silent as on the morning of the creation.

Silently and deadly had the scout done his work, and then he took the Indian's head-gear and blanket, and putting them on, turned and crept softly down toward the three Indians in waiting. He had resolved upon a bold stroke—one that would cost him his life if it failed.

In passing himself off for the Indian, it suddenly occurred to him that he would have to give some kind of a report when he reached the three Indians. He could speak the Indian language to perfection, but what should he report not to get himself into trouble? He thought the matter over carefully, and finally settled upon his course of action. He then quickened his footsteps, and soon joined the three savages waiting by the tree.

"Light flash one time," he said in a low whisper and in Sioux dialect.

To his joy and relief, one of the Indians turned and climbing onto the leaning tree began crawling along its trunk. He was immediately followed by the other two, and by this movement Phil saw that the light was the signal for their advance. But, scarcely was the third Indian upon the tree, ere the scout was close at his heels, determined on another desperate stroke.

Half the length of the tree had been made when time for action came. Reaching forward, he seized the savage by the loin-cloth and jerked him off the log. Then followed a loud splash, a confused, strangling gasp, and the Indian was swept away by the swift current of the channel.

The fall of the warrior into the water awoke the men on the island, and the hurrying of feet thereon brought the other two Indians to a halt. But for Phil there was no delay, and creeping up behind the next warrior, he shoved him off into the river; but scarcely had he touched the water, before the third and last one went tumbling after him, and Phil was master of the situation.

But those on the island were, by this time, fully aroused and rushing toward the west side to learn the cause of the strange confusion.

"Stiddy down thar, friends," called Phil in a low tone, then he swung himself over and dropped down into the midst of his excited comrades.

"What in the name of destruction does this fuss all mean, Foghorn?" asked Judge Trout.

"It means deviltry, boys. Thar's a hull kit o' savages under this 'ere island, an' two on it, an' three that ar'n't on it, but war makin' along that ar' tree, when I ups an' knocks 'em slap-dab into the water."

"Do you say that are two on this island?" asked the man who had been on guard; "I don't believe it, for I've been on guard myself."

"I don't keer a cuss, Jule; thar is, or war, two Injins on this 'ere island half an hour ago, 'mong you fellers; and, boys, we mustn't fool here. We're in eminent danger. The red mud-snoots are rootin' up through the bank this holy minute, and we've got to look sharp or our hair's gone up. What do you advise, captain?"

The last words were directed to Captain Rhymn, who, at this juncture, joined the crowd.

"I will leave all to you, Foghorn," he said, "for my wounds are too painful to do my duty. Go ahead and do what you think best."

"Then we'd better search the island for 'em two red-skins, and when we git their hair, pull out fur safer quarters," suggested the scout.

A thorough search of the island was at once made, but the two Indians could not be found. They had escaped, no doubt, by swinging themselves over the edge of the bank, by means of the roots trailing down, and had joined their comrades under the island.

The search being relinquished, preparation for departure was at once made. Foghorn Phil and young Frank Bassett assisted the wounded Captain Rhymn aboard the flat-boat and placed him upon a couch of skins; but before one of the rest had set foot upon the boat, Dick Trout's voice was heard to shout:

"To yer arms, boys! The red devils have dug through, and are swarmin' onto the island! Whoop! hurrah for the Big Horns and death!"

"My God, Foghorn, we are too late after all!" cried young Bassett.

Then arose a fierce, savage yell from the island, that was answered by a shout from the lips of the traders. Then followed the rush of feet, the crash of firearms, mingled with the clash of steel, dull, sudden blows, the thump of falling bodies, and groans and shrieks of agony.

Foghorn Phil, who was still on the flatboat, started to join in the conflict, but before he could reach the island, an unseen hand cut loose the boat, which instantly swung out into the river, cutting off Phil and Bassett's return to the island.

"Great Jupiter!" cried the scout, almost wild with excitement, "the red hellions have cut our boat loose, and we can never git onto the island! And my Lor', boys, to think that the boys are in danger, and Foghorn Phil unable to— Gar almighty! what's that?"

High above the din of the battle, a fearful sound startled the night—a sound like a mighty flood of water rushing through a broken sluice-gate.

"In heaven's name, what is it, indeed?" cried Captain Rhymn, starting up from his couch.

"Look! Look!" cried Phil, pointing up toward the sky. "Gar almighty look!—the islan' is goin'!"

His two companions looked in the direction indicated, and to their horror and surprise, saw the tops of the tall, slender cottonwood trees sinking downward. Then all guessed the cause of that awful rush and roar—a fact that had been predicted as possible and probable by Foghorn Phil long before they had landed upon the island. The swift-rushing waters, aided by the tunneling of the Indians, had undermined the island, and with an awful sound of rushing waters, it crumbled to pieces and sunk beneath the waves. Then with a fearful surge, the waters closed over it, and rolled back in mighty waves that bore human burdens upon their foamy crests!

And now instead of the combatants' cries, and the din of battle, arose drowning shrieks and moans of distress, as, side by side, both friend and foe struggled, not with each other, but their new enemy, the swift rushing waters of the mad Missouri!

CHAPTER X.

BELZEBUB BUMBLE, ESQ.

SPEECHLESS with terror, Pauline Afton and Josie Markham clung closer to each other, and watched those dull, burning orbs thrust almost into their very faces. They could not move—they could not cry out, and with all the agonies of a horrible nightmare, from which they could not wake, they sat and met, with dilated eyes, that subtle, fascinating gaze. But at length relief came—a sound broke the strange, mesmeric spell—a voice close before them asked:

"Hey, ar'n't you female weemin'?"

A thrill shot through the maidens' veins—a vague thrill of hope and fear. There was relief in knowing that those orbs of fire were those of a human being.

"I say, are ye females what's clim' from yer noses into this 'ere tree right afore me? Speak right slap out; ye needn't be afraid of me, for I'm ole Belzebub Bumble, Esquire, hunter and trapper of the flowin' Milk river."

"Thank Heaven!" gasped Pauline, the load of fear upon her heart lightened by the man's words; "we are helpless girls, and greatly in need of friends, Mr. Bumble."

"Je-whiz!" exclaimed the apparently astonished Bumble. "I know from yer soft, music-like voice that yer young and purty; and I'll be a picayune that you've got hearts as clean as angels' that sing around the throne on high. But, gals, Belzy Bumble can't say that for hisself; altho', I prides myself on being a good shot, a swift runner and a monstrous old ignoramus,

and, also, a woman's man—that is, I fight fur female innocence and purity. Them 'ere good qualities I know you uns persess, else a pack o' Injin varlets with that infurnal cut-throat, Alf Ramee, wouldn't be arter ye. Ye see, I heard ye comin' like Satan on a log, and up into this tree I lit like a jay bird, and what war my astonishment when I heard ye stop under the tree and then bounce up here, too; but when I heard the reds go rippin' by, and heard ye whisperin' bout that Alf Ramee, I knew what it all meant, and so I concluded to make myself known to ye, and so I did. And gals, my servise is at your command if ye think ye could trust me in the dark. I'll admit right here that I'm an orful ugly ole stick, and if ye could see me in the light, I know you'd think me a grizzly b'ar; but my words for it, gals, I ain't nobody but Belzebub Bumble, Esquire; and I claim that I have a heart that has throbbed for others' woes—a heart that knows mercy and sympathy, if I are ole Belzy Bumble."

There was a rude sort of politeness in the man's tone, and a frank, open earnestness in his words that impressed the girls quite favorably, and removed the weight of doubt and fear from their minds, for all Belzebub Bumble was an entire stranger to them. There was something in the man's presence and voice that told them they could trust him.

"We are greatly in need of a friend, Mr. Bumble," replied Pauline Afton, "and I hope you can assist us to get back to our friends."

"We will see that you are well rewarded for your service, Mr. Bumble," added Josie.

"Plague take the reward, weemin'; Belzy Bumble never takes a pay for kindness. It's a debt I like to have owin' me tho', for it's no tellin' how soon I may want an exchange of favors. But, if we're to cast lots together for a while, we'd better be gettin' down to *terry firmy*, and away from here, for Ramee and his hounds will soon be back, so here I goes, slap-dab down to the—"

The rest of the sentence was lost to the maidens' ears, as he shot downward through the foliage to the earth. Then he laid aside his rifle and assisted the maidens down.

"Now, chicks, jist you foller ole Belzy," said the scout, taking up his rifle and leading the way toward the river.

Hand-in-hand the girls followed him softly through the undergrowth, and in a few minutes they reached a spot on the river bank where the moonlight fell full upon them. The females were now enabled to see the face of the man to whom they had intrusted their lives. It was a face rough and bearded, and not calculated, of itself, to win admiration at first sight; but the maidens had already been impressed with the goodness of the man, reflected in his kind, rude words and acts of kindness. There was nothing deceptive in his talk nor looks, yet there was a certain hesitation and blundering in his speech which told that he was unaccustomed to female society, although he seemed fully cognizant of the polite respect due to the gentler sex.

As they issued from the shadows into the moonlight, the old borderman gazed down into the pretty pale faces of the girls with a kind of superstitious admiration that all at once found expression in the involuntary exclamation:

"Je-whiz! puffet little angels!"

The next instant the dip of many oars fell upon the trio's ears, coming from up the river. They all glanced up the moonlit stream, and saw a large flat-boat drifting into view from around a bend. There was not less than thirty men aboard of it, and some of these men were Indians.

"Thar comes my gang, now," said Bumble, pointing toward the descending craft; "and when we once git aboard of that boat, we'll be safe."

"Why, is it the Big Horn Traders?" asked Josie.

"Nary Big Horn, miss. It are the Milk River Traders what are tryin' their souls' best to beat the Big Horns to their Blackfoot agency. But I'll guarantee your safety, gals, but—" and he suddenly broke off, as though a startling thought had occurred to his mind—"I furgot to ask ye, gals, whar ye belong?"

"At Fort Union," replied Pauline.

"Fort Union; and what mout yer names be?"

"My name is Pauline Afton, and my companion's name, Josephine Markham."

"Holy destruction! It are a God's blessing ye told me so, fur it would 'a' been wus than murder to have taken ye aboard that raft."

"Why so, Mr. Bumble? What difference will your knowledge of the fact make?"

"Because you are the very ones wanted on

that 'ere boat. I'll tell you; the captain c' that consarn and a certain other feller has had a trap set to ketch you very gals, and they hired that double-eyed devil, Alf Ramee, renegade Sioux chief, to do the wor'c, and he's come mighty nigh it, I tell ye."

"And who is that certain other fellow in league with your captain?" asked Pauline.

"God bless ye, gal, I—I daren't tell ye now." "And so you are one of that captain's crew?" said Pauline, a tinge of scorn in her voice.

"Wal, I won't say that I am, miss, though I don't want to creep 'round the truth. I'm hired by them Milk Riverites as their scout and guide, and I endeavor to serve 'em, so far as right and honesty is consarned. Money's what I'm arter, and I don't keer who I git it of, so I git it 'bout straight. I'm not hired to steal gals and shoot them as are enemies to the Milk River crew, but simply to take a canoe and go on in advance of the boat and see that no traps are set fur 'em. I war reconnoiterin' ahead to-night, lookin' fur a campin'-ground, when I happened hereaways, and now I've got my hands chock-full. But I'll let 'em go to blazes afore I'll desert you, gals; but I kin serve both. I've got to stick to 'em fellers until a certain time, fur to tell you the truth, gals, I'm more in the empl'y of the Big Horn Traders than 'em than Milk Rivers—secret service, you see—as a spy. So come with me; I've a canoe right here, in which I'll run you up to a safe p'int, then come back and pilot the traders to a campin'-place."

He led the way down to the water's edge, where a small canoe was moored, and assisting the maidens into it, he entered, took up the paddle, and started the craft down the stream, keeping close in under the shadows of the east shore, to avoid discovery. In this manner they journeyed on until a bend in the river concealed the flat-boat from view; then he pulled boldly out into the stream and pushed the canoe rapidly forward.

In a few minutes more they came to a group of small islands, and to the smallest of these he pulled up, saying:

"On this island, gals, I want you to stay till I return with some food and blankets. I'll be here within three hours, and then we can make further arrangements fur escape. I'm goin' to land the traders on the big island just below here, but don't git skart. Ye can hide in thar among 'em bushes, and be as safe as a bug in a rug."

The girls readily obeyed his instructions and stepped from the boat onto the island, when Bumble at once pulled off and turned up the river.

Again the maidens were alone, more helpless than ever, for they were surrounded by the waters of a deep, rushing river, with no chance of escape, should Bumble never return. They crept in among the dense vegetation with which the island was covered, and seated themselves on the old drift-log.

"Oh, Paulie!" said Josephine, after they had expressed their great joy and thanks over their being enabled to obtain a few minutes' rest and respite from dangers, "what if Bumble is a bad man, and intends to keep us here until he can get the price that De Ramee was to get for our abduction?"

"It would be awful, Josie," replied her companion; but I feel certain that Bumble is a true friend—a rude but honest-hearted hunter."

"All thought Alfonso De Ramee was a gentleman, but he turns out to be a treacherous renegade chief," replied Josie.

"Ah! there come the traders," whispered Pauline; "we will soon know whether Bumble is true or not."

The great raft, with its motley crew, hove in sight, and as it came nearer and nearer, the girls scarcely breathed, so great were their fear and suspense. To their joy, the boat passed on, and pulled up to a large island about a hundred yards below that on which the girls were concealed.

The traders soon effected a landing, and in a short time a roaring fire was burning, its bright beams reaching out upon all sides, and lighting up the river with a strange, weird-like glow.

The maidens could see the men stalking about the fire, giant and grotesque in their shadowy outlines. They could hear their rough voices engaged in rude talk, ribald jests and song. Among the score and a half of moving figures, they could easily distinguish that of their friend, Belzebub Bumble.

As the night wore away, however, the revelers became less noisy, and it soon was apparent that some of them had sought their couches for the night, while others lounged around the fire, talking in undertones and smoking.

The fugitives were not expecting the return of Bumble yet, and were greatly surprised when they discovered him coming down the river in a canoe keeping their island between him and the traders. He soon reached their retreat and landed. He had brought with him several blankets and robes, and an ample supply of food, such as it was.

The girls thanked him kindly for his trouble and considerate provision for their welfare. In every way they manifested a due appreciation of his goodness, and the man's rough face brightened, and his gray eyes glowed with the light of thoughts he could not express.

It was seldom within his province to render such service in behalf of innocence and purity; and to know that those two fair, lovely girls were dependent upon his strong arm—to hear their sweet, musical voices pouring out their heartfelt thanks and gratitude to him, afforded him the greatest pleasure he had ever enjoyed.

It touched his better nature so pointedly that his heart glowed with all the chivalric devotion that ever inspired the breast of a gallant knight of old, and he resolved to die rather than see harm befall the two fair girls.

"I managed to hook a few blankets and some food fur ye, gals," he said, proudly. "I know they aren't as good as you've been used to, but it's the best I could do."

"It is good enough, God knows, Mr. Bumble," replied Pauline.

"Wal, if we *had* better, you 'uns should have it, but we haven't; and now, gals, I must leave you to onc't, for fear I'm see'd 'round this islan' and a mice is smelt. In an hour from now you will have another visitor. It will be an Indian princess, Anamosa, the White Fawn. She knows all about you bein' here—I told her, and she wants to see Miss Markham."

"What! An Indian princess wants to see me?" exclaimed Josie, in astonishment.

"Yes, ma'am," replied the hunter, with the air of an overgrown schoolboy; "but you needn't be afraid o' her, gals; she's as true-hearted as an angel, and 's comin' to help you 'uns out o' danger. Remember she'll be here in an hour. She'll tell you your program' when she comes, so good-evenin', gals."

"Good-night, Mr. Bumble."

With a bow, the good-hearted hunter turned, and entering his canoe, paddled away toward the west shore. The girls watched him until lost in the shadows of the distance, then they spread a blanket upon the earth and sat down upon it to eat their food, and ponder over the intended visit and its purport.

The hour soon passed, and then the maidens saw a tiny canoe put out toward them from the west shore. Its occupant was a female, who handled the paddle with remarkable swiftness, and in a minute's time, the prow of the little craft touched the island.

The lithe figure of an Indian girl sprung lightly out; and drawing her canoe entirely out of the water, turned, and bent her head in the attitude of intense listening. With cautious footsteps she then advanced toward the center of the island, where Pauline and Josie awaited her.

The latter arose, and in soft tones greeted the princess in words of welcome.

Anamosa was small in form, with features decidedly beautiful in contour. Her eyes were of a soft brown, large and innocent in expression as the eyes of a young deer. Her long dark hair, gathered away from her brow, hung in braids down her back. A fillet of sparkling jewels girded her brow, and flashed like rubies among her dark hair. Around her arms and neck she wore rich, sparkling ornaments, that contrasted oddly with the short buck-skin frock, wrought in many colors with devices strange and fantastic.

But, withal, there was little in the features of Anamosa that resembled those of an Indian; in fact, there was nothing but her dress and dusky skin that was indicative of her race.

"Then the white hunter told you that I was coming?" the princess said, seeing that her presence created no surprise.

"Yes; he told us an Indian princess, called Anamosa, was coming to see us," replied Pauline.

"I am Anamosa," explained the dusky maid, "and I am a friend to the whites, especially to both my white sisters; and I have come to warn one of impending danger."

"We are glad you are our friend, Anamosa; but why are we both not in danger?"

"Because one is loved by an unscrupulous white man."

Pauline's heart seemed to rise in her throat to choke her, and her thoughts at once flew to her lover, Colonel Aylesworth. It must be he, she

thought, that Anamosa meant, for Josie Markham was heart-free.

It is true, Josie *may* have been loved, but if she did not love in return, she was in no danger and needed no warning.

If the princess had reference to her lover, Pauline did not wish to hear her warning, for she was satisfied that Aylesworth was a man whose soul was unburdened, and whose devotion to her was of the purest kind. Her emotions were somewhat calmed when Anamosa said:

"Which of my white sisters is Josie Markham?"

"I am Miss Markham," answered Josie.

"You love a gentleman, I believe?"

Josie's eyes sought the ground, and a flush mounted to her cheeks, but, after a moment's hesitation, she looked at the princess, while a confused smile played over her face.

"Why, Anamosa, do you inquire?" she said.

"I make the inquiry to save you, poor child, from the injury and shame that another has suffered. The man you love is my lawfully-wedded husband, but he deserted me, and my love turned to hatred, and if there is no law nor power here to punish the villain, he shall not destroy the happiness of another woman, be she red or white."

The princess spoke like a person of education. A little cry broke from Josie's lips, half surprise and half joy.

"I am very thankful to you for your warning, though it was entirely unnecessary to prevent me wedding that man, for I have never—"

"Hark!" suddenly interrupted Anamosa.

All three subsided into a dead silence and listened. The dip of a paddle caught their ears, and like a startled deer Anamosa sprang to her feet and swept the river around them with a keen glance.

From the shadows of the east shore she saw a canoe glide out, and head directly toward the little island upon which they stood. There were three men in it, and from the frightened looks and words of the Indian princess, it was evident that she knew who they were.

"Ay!" she exclaimed, in a terrified voice, "they are coming here. They do not know we are on the island, but they may discover us, and then, alas!"

"Do you know them, Anamosa?" asked one of her companions.

"Too well, dear child; they are our enemies. One is Alfonso De Ramee, the renegade Sioux chief; one the captain of the Milk River Traders, who hired De Ramee to kidnap Miss Afton, and the other, the villain who hired De Ramee to kidnap Miss Markham—three as vile outlaws as ever went unpunished."

A little cry of terror escaped the lips of the maidens.

"And is there no avenue of escape for us, Anamosa?" asked Pauline.

"If we had a canoe, we might get away; my canoe is but a frail one that would not carry two persons."

"Then do not risk your life here with us, Anamosa, but take your canoe and go. I have a revolver which has done good service in defeating De Ramee once, and I can use it again if need be."

"No, no, girls," replied Anamosa, "I will not desert you. I have a weapon also, and as our three fates are indirectly linked, let us stand together in this trying hour. But come, let us conceal ourselves on the west side of the island, for they will be apt to land on the east side."

The three arose, and taking their blankets, crept softly through the shrubbery to the west side, where they seated themselves.

Scarcely had they done so, ere Alf De Ramee and his two confederates in crime landed upon the little island within twenty feet of three crouching female figures!

CHAPTER XI.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

ONE fully acquainted with the nature of the "Mad Missouri," as it has been aptly termed, will readily concede the possibility of such a remarkable freak as that we have recorded in a preceding chapter—the sinking of the island on which the Big Horn Traders had encamped. Instances are known where this eccentric stream can cut its way across a large bend, a mile across, in a single day; and in one night, islands of more than an acre in area have disappeared.

By the time the island, upon which our friends had encamped, had sunk, the flat-boat upon which Foghorn Phil, Frank Bassett and Captain Rhymn had been carried away, had drifted about five rods below the island. The cries of the traders struggling in the water appealed

strongly to the heart of Phil, and launching the remaining canoe, he sprung into it and started back to the assistance of those of his friends who had not been killed or drowned.

Captain Rhymn and young Bassett were now alone upon the flat-boat, and for the want of skill and strength, they were unable to turn the raft in to shore, as they made repeated efforts to do, in hopes of rendering some assistance to their friends. So they were compelled to remain aboard of the craft, and wait in dire suspense for the result of the island disaster; and this information could only be obtained from some of those behind, and from them they were drifting further and further at each moment.

"Bassett," said Captain Rhymn, in a tone of bitter disappointment and sadness, "I am afraid that the fate of the Big Horn Traders is sealed—that but few of the boys will survive the island disaster. And as we are near the mouth of the Milk river, we may now look out for trouble from the Milk River Traders."

"It is a terrible ending of a pleasant trip, captain," replied Bassett, "and even if I should escape the dangers yet before us, it will be a terrible task for me to bear the sad news of Colonel Aylesworth's death, to his friends."

"Yes, Frank, for when Aylesworth died, a noble man was lost," said Rhymn, sadly.

"True, captain; Aylesworth was one of nature's noblemen; but, captain, I believe our party was betrayed into the enemies' power by a traitor."

The captain started, and fixed a keen, searching glance upon Bassett's face.

"Do you really think so, Bassett?" he asked.

"I do. Those savages that were concealed under the island, knew we were going to stop there, and some one of our crew must have told them our intentions in time for them to set their traps."

"There is not one of my crew upon whom I could fix this stigma, unless it is Judge Trout."

"I differ with you, captain; I think it was Jake Du Busk. I have mistrusted his real character ever since we started on this expedition."

Captain Rhymn expressed the deepest regret that any of his men had ever given cause for such suspicion; and expressed a hope that all would prove themselves clear.

By this time the flat-boat had drifted a quarter of a mile down the stream, and all sounds of that terrible disaster at the island had become hushed. They were now within a mile of the mouth of the Milk river, and Captain Rhymn began to express great fears of running into new dangers. If they only had a canoe, they could easily abandon the raft and take to the shore, but as it was, they were compelled to remain entirely idle, while the current was carrying them slowly away from their friends.

Young Bassett kept a constant watch up the river in hopes that Foghorn Phil would come to their release; but in this he was doomed to disappointment. However, his attention was suddenly arrested by a canoe putting out toward them from the north shore, the occupant, a white man, paddling quite rapidly. As he approached the raft, the captain and Frank recognized him as Alfonso De Ramee, the young Spanish gentleman, with whom they had formed an acquaintance at Fort Union; but whose true character was not unknown to them. Rhymn hailed him with words of welcome, and assisted him aboard the raft.

"Why, De Ramee, what brings you here this time of the night?" asked the captain.

"Captain," replied De Ramee, "the devil is to pay to-night, all along the river; and you are wanted ashore immediately by one who told me all about your troubles at the island. I will take you ashore, captain, and then send half a dozen men to this boat to aid Mr. Bassett in running it in to shore, to await for you to join it."

"Do you know whether those Milk River Traders are about, Mr. De Ramee?" asked Bassett, somewhat disappointed by the arrangements of De Ramee, which precluded his going ashore with them.

"They are one day's journey up the Milk river yet," replied the lying hypocrite, for he knew that the Milk River Traders were within a mile of them at that very moment, "so you need entertain no fears from this source, Mr. Bassett."

The next minute De Ramee and Rhymn were in the canoe, moving rapidly shoreward. Was the captain being lured into a snare, as Pauline Afton and Josie Markham had been?

Frank Bassett watched them until they had disappeared in the shadows of the shore, then a truer sense of his lonely situation was im-

pressed strongly upon him, and, advancing to the center of the boat, he seated himself on a roll of furs, uneasy and suspicious. More than once he imagined he could hear the suppressed breathing of enemies concealed all around him; and even some of the rolls of furs seemed like foes, and appeared to be creeping toward him. These vagaries he endeavored to shake off, but the more he tried, the stronger they grew upon him, until the horrible spell was suddenly broken by the dip of a paddle.

Rising to his feet and glancing shoreward, he discovered a long, clumsy-looking dug-out creeping out from the shadows of the north shore, and moving obliquely down the river toward the flatboat. It contained but a single occupant, whom Bassett at once recognized as Dick Trout, the hunter. His presence was hailed with joy by the young man, for the hunter was one of those who went down with the island.

It required but a few minutes for the scout to paddle the dug-out down to the raft, and having secured it alongside, by means of a rope, sprung onto the flatboat, and said:

"All alone are ye, Frank?"

"All alone, judge. The captain just went ashore with that Spanish gentleman, Alfonso De Ramee, of Fort Union, who is in this neighborhood with friends, and who is in trouble with the Indians. But, Dick, I never expected to see one of you fellows alive again. How many es-caped?"

"Twelve o' the hull escaped the fight and the sinkin' o' the island, tho' we all got a glorious duckin'. But see here, Frank," and he plucked Bassett to one side, and, pointing down into the dug-out, said, in a whisper—"do you see 'em fellers?"

Frank looked as directed, and, to his surprise, saw half-a-dozen dark forms lying motionless in the bottom of the craft.

"What does it mean, Dick?" Bassett asked.

"Mum's the word," replied Dick, nudging Frank; "they're six o' the boys come to save you and the boat."

"What do you mean, Trout?"

"I mean this: that's five Injins this holy minute on this boat wrapped up among the robes and skins yander."

"You're jesting, Dick."

"It's the Bible truth, Frank."

"How did they get on the boat? and how did you find out they were here?"

"They got on at the island—crept out from under the bank. One Belzebub Bumble, the scout of the Milk Riverites, and a spy in the employ of the Big Horns, or some o' them at least, put a bug in my ear, and so—'Sh! hark!—do ye hear that cricket chirrupin'? That's the red devils' signal for the attack—ah! there they come! Up, boys, and fight like wild-cats!—Hurrah! whoop, hurra for the tigers o' the Big Horn!"

Up from among the bundles of robes and skins sprung five Indians, and at the same instant Dick's six secreted companions arose from the dug-out and leaped onto the raft.

The next instant the din and clang of a desperate hand-to-hand encounter thrilled out in startling echoes on the midnight air.

CHAPTER XII.

BELZY BUMBLE PUTS IN AN APPEARANCE.

AFTER leaving the flat-boat, Foghorn Phil paddled his canoe rapidly back toward the sunken island, where savages and whites were struggling alike together with the tossing, foaming waves. Wherever he saw a head above the water, he paddled toward it, and if it was a friend, assistance was rendered. The first he found was Colonel Aylesworth, who was nearly exhausted, having been carried several feet under the water when the island disappeared.

In a few minutes all the survivors of the catastrophe were rescued. Five were missing, and must have been killed or drowned.

Foghorn Phil related how the captain, Frank Bassett, and himself had been carried away upon the raft at the beginning of the fight; and narrated all that had transpired under his own eyes during the moments that had passed between the time he had discovered enemies under the island, and the beginning of the fight, concluding with a slight intimation of there being a traitor in their party. But the latter was thrown out as afeeler.

"You mout as well come out flat-footed, Phil," said Lute Soper. "I think just as you do, that that's sumthin' loose somewhar, and I think we'll find it's with Jake Du Busk."

"I think Du Busk is an accessory," replied Phil.

"Then you think there is more than one traitor, do you?" asked Colonel Aylesworth.

"I'd almost risk my life on't, colonel. The thing war all set up to snake us in on that island, afore we got there. A traitor told 'em that we war goin' to land thar, and so the red varlets got under that island afore we got in site o' it. Now look here; when Jake Du Busk went ashore as scout, it was understood that we'd keep on till the mouth o' the Milk was passed; but gittin' into trouble, we changed our notion and concluded to stop at that island, and done so in less than an hour. Now, the man that went ashore after we come to this conclusion, and before we got to the island is the traitor—"

"Then, by jinkers!" exclaimed Soper, "Cap'n Rhymn is—"

Here silence was imposed upon the speaker by the sound of a heavy body thrashing through the undergrowth near by, and before the party could decide upon any course of action, a man burst from the shrubbery and stopped before them.

"Belzebub Bumble, by the holy wars!" burst from the lips of Foghorn. "For'd, Belzy! Your hand, ole boy—shake!"

The two hunters greeted each other with a warmth that told of a feeling stronger than that of mere friendship, for they seemed to forget all else in the joy of their meeting.

"This, boys," Foghorn Phil said, turning to his companions, "is a dear ole friend o' mine. His name's Belzebub Bumble, and is as good a feller as ever drewed bead on a buck, or licked a knife across an Injin's noddle."

Colonel Aylesworth and the traders greeted the scout in kind words, when Phil continued:

"Belzebub Bumble is to the Milk Riverites what I am to the Big Horners, and it's through him that I've been kept posted as to the movements of his crew, who seem to hold a burnin' spite at us ever since we beat 'em outen the Teton furs, last fall. But what's in the wind, ole friend?"

"Death and deviltry, Phillip," replied Bumble; "and a bit o' news that beats the speckled Jews."

"What is it—what is it, Belzy?"

"A part o' your crew and a part o' mine are in cahoots, for all they make an awful fuss 'bout killin' each other; and they arranged that both parties should meet hereaways 'bout the same time, when the Milks war to have a trap set to nab the Big Horns. I jist found this out last night, and to-night I learned another that lays all others in the dark for hellish meanness. Nat Nogle, captain o' the Milk Riverites, and as mean a man as ever wheezed, and one o' your crew, employed one Alfonso De Ramee, a notorious adventurer and renegade Sioux chief, to kidnap two girls from Fort Union, and the infernal scamp done it, too."

"Who were the girls, did you learn?" asked Aylesworth.

"Josie Markham and Pauline Afton," replied Bumble.

A groan escaped the young colonel's lips.

"You needn't take on, young man," said Bumble, "fur the gals are safe, whatever they may be to you. They give Ramee the slip, and I helped 'em to an island near the mouth o' the Milk. They're not over a mile from here, and we must hurry and get 'em away, for the Milk Riverites are encamped but a few rods below."

"Thank God they are safe!" exclaimed Aylesworth, "and let us lose no time in going to their assistance. But, Bumble, who of our party is in league with the villains of yours?"

"One that'll suffer for his meanness," was the evasive reply. "I know'd you were to be attacked to-night by a party o' Injins and Milk Riverites. I know'd, afore you did, that a pack o' the knaves war under the island, but I could not leave the gals and git up here and warn you in time to prevent the attack, for all I done my level best, boys. But, boys, two o' yer men, Captain Rhymn and another chap, is on the flat-boat yet; and it's them that's in danger. Thar's three Injins and two Milk Rivers on that boat this blessed minute, concealed among yer packs. They war there to run yer cargo off jist as soon as yer war attacked on the island, and as they got the captain and that other feller, they'll be apt to kill 'em unless you go to their assistance at onc't."

"I'm one that's ready to go," exclaimed Dick, and half a dozen others signified their readiness to accompany him.

"All right, boys," said Bumble; "but I want Foghorn and this kernel man to go with me arter the gals. You fellers can hurry down the river till you come to a little cove with a single tall tree at the edge of it. Thar ye'll find a long ole dug-out, in which ye can reach the flat-boat,

which is still driftin' on at the will o' the current. The concealed devils were not to make the attack till opposite the mouth o' the Milk, whar that be others to help 'em."

Dick Trout and his companions at once turned and proceeded down the river, while Colonel Aylesworth and Foghorn Phil, led by Belzy Bumble, took their way across the narrow strip of woods lying between the Milk and Missouri rivers.

The emotion of fear and suspense in the breast of Colonel Aylesworth had now become almost agonizing, as he thought of his betrothed, and the danger with which she was surrounded.

And the nearer they approached to the place where Bumble had left the maidens, the stronger the conviction became impressed upon him that those red sleuth-hounds of the forest had hunted them down, and carried them away to an unknown fate!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LEAGUE OF THREE.

We will now return to the three females whom we left on the island, in such close proximity to Alfonso De Ramee, Nat Nogle, and another person, whom we will eventually make known.

Huddled together, the three women scarcely breathed, through fear of being discovered; and with dilated eyes they watched the three men.

The latter appeared to move without caution, and soon as they had landed, proceeded inland and seated themselves on the very log where Pauline and Josie had sat a few minutes before.

From this point the females could hear every word spoken, for the men spoke in unguarded tones; they seemed to be under the influence of liquor.

"Now, Alfonso," said Nat Nogle, captain of the Milk River Traders, "let us hear your story 'bout them girls, and if it's a fair one, I'm willin' to pay you half the price offered for them.

"Well," replied De Ramee, "the Government steamer lying at Fort Union brought a party of excursionists up the Missouri to within thirty miles of here, and among the number were the objects of your affections, Misses Markham and Afton.

"The matter of a buffalo-hunt had been agitated and prepared for before we left the fort. I knew that a party of ladies would accompany the hunters, and was well satisfied that Markham and Afton would be among the number. So, before the departure of the steamer, I communicated with my spy outlying near the fort, and he at once bore a message to my Indians, who were to be in the vicinity of the Two Buttes at a certain time.

"As it happened, no ladies, except Afton and Markham, accompanied the party; and even they would not have gone had it not been that Miss Josephine had a brother in the party, and so concluded it would not be unbecoming of her to ride with him.

"Well, we reached the buffalo country, and sure enough found a large herd of buffalo. During the chase, I managed to get the girls away by a little maneuvering, and led them right toward the point where a signal had told me my Indians were encamped; but in the very moment of my victory, what should that little spit-fire, Pauline, do, but out with a revolver and shoot my horse under me; then they turned, and away they went."

A low, silent laugh burst from the lips of the villain's companions.

"Well, we pursued them," continued De Ramee, "but somehow or other they got away in the woods and darkness. We found their horses a short ways down the river, riderless. Where they are, I can't say; though Grill declares he saw a man in a canoe near this island with two women; but of course, Grill's such a liar that we never listen to him, and so that's my story."

The females shuddered, and inwardly thanked the fates that had made Grill such an unreliable source of information.

"Now, Roche," said Nogle, addressing his other companion, "let's hear your story."

"Bottle first," said De Ramee, producing a large bottle, from which the three drank freely.

"There now, I can talk easier," said the man addressed as Roche, smacking his lips with high gusto.

At sound of this man's voice, a sigh escaped Josie Markham's lips, and a shudder convulsed her form.

"Now, listen," said Anamosa, whispering in her ear, "and you shall hear the man whom I have overheard breathing words of love in your ear within the shadows of a clump of cottonwoods near Fort Union."

"If those girls get back to the steamer," said Roche, "my cake will be dough, for I dare not remain much longer in the country. I have reason to believe there are enemies following me; in fact, I know of one to-day, but he's safe now within the cool embrace of the Missouri."

"Who was it?" asked De Ramee.

"Colonel Aylesworth."

It was Pauline's turn now to start, and the cry that arose to her lips could scarcely be restrained.

"But," continued Roche, "I am afraid there are others that know what Aylesworth did; and so I've got to move further west, but I'll swear I can't go without that girl, Josie. I thought once I could make her love me, but after breathin' volumes of love and nonsense in her ear, and makin' a fool of myself in general, she coolly informed me that she wanted time to consider. The fact of it is, she's a genuine flirt, and has been using me to quicken the impulse of some one else—that Frank Bassett I think. But she needn't trouble herself about him, for she will not get him, for have her *I will*; and now to business: s'pose they have escaped, and got back to the steamer, can't we raise sufficient force to capture the whole?"

"I can command a force of five hundred Sioux under Sitting Bull in twenty-four hours," said Nogle, "and, with my own force, we could eat the steamer and crew up; but how many Big Horns escaped our little trap?"

"None that I know of except Frank Bassett, Foghorn Phil, and the captain. But, Bassett is safe by this time, for a number of our friends were concealed on the boat to capture it whenever a favorable moment was offered."

"Captain Rhymm's safe, also," added De Ramee, with a drunken laugh, nudging Roche in the side with his elbow, "for I went over to their boat and coaxed him ashore, and—well, you know the rest."

The three villains laughed, then drank from the bottle again.

"Oh, the accursed wretches!" whispered Anamosa, a fierce, revengeful fire burning in her eyes.

"If we could only have got Foghorn Phil out of the way," Nogle continued, "we would have one powerful enemy less to deal with; but our scout, Belzy Bumble, is out arter him, and it may be he'll rake in Foggy's hair."

"Thank God the villains are deceived there," said Pauline.

"Yes, indeed: Bumble and Foghorn are intimate friends," replied Anamosa, "and while they have been acting as scouts for their respective parties, they have been spies on the same parties' movements in the employ of—well, no master who it is."

After some further conversation in which high words ensued between Nogle and de Ramee, in regard to the matter of paying the latter for his service in kidnapping the maidens, the three arose to leave the island. They staggered away to the upper end of it, De Ramee going before.

They had no more than reached the margin of the island, when the females heard the sharp crack of a pistol, followed by a groan and the fall of a body. Then they heard Nogle say:

"Thar, Roche, we had no further use for De Ramee, and to save him blowin' on us, it's just as well to have him mum."

"Oh, girls!" whispered Anamosa, "De Ramee has fallen a victim to his wickedness. Nogle has killed him, and God only knows what they'll do next—but hark!—what is Nogle saying?"

"Hi ho, what have we here, Roche? A canoe as I'm born to die! Mebby Grill was right about seeing a man and wimin round here."

"What a blunder!" exclaimed the Indian maid; "they have found our canoe, and I am afraid it will lead to our discovery. But if they go to searching the island, let us run around the island and spring into their canoe and pull out for shore—ah! they are searching the island this minute. Come, girls!"

Quickly and silently the three females crept through the undergrowth to where the villains' canoe lay. They involuntarily paused upon the beach, and started back with a shudder, for before them laid the murdered Alf De Ramee, his handsome wicked face upturned to the pale moonbeams! But, recovering from their sudden horror, they passed the body and sprung into the canoe, Anamosa having first sent her own adrift.

Then the dusky maid dipped the paddle, and the canoe shot out into the river.

Like maddened beasts the two drunken outlaws plunged through the undergrowth and reached the upper side of the island in time to see their canoe, with the three women, glide into the shadows of the west shore.

"Curses, ten thousand curses upon the fates, Roche!" burst from Nogle's lips; "them girls were on the island and have escaped in our canoe! Blind fools we were; I shall call for some of the boys to bring a canoe and we'll follow the jades. Hullo-ah, down thar! hullo-ah, I say!"

He was answered from the west shore, and in a few minutes a canoe put out toward the island.

The instant the three females reached the shore, three men came from the woods and met them.

"Anamosa?" called one of them.

"Ay, 'tis you, Mr. Bumble," replied Anamosa.

"Yes; me and Foghorn Phil, and Colonel Aylesworth."

A cry burst from Pauline's lips—a cry of joy, and the next moment she was in the arms of her lover.

In a few words Anamosa acquainted Phil and Bumble of the manner of their escape; then, when the outlaws began to yell for a canoe, Bumble answered them, and having spoken a few words to his companions, he sprang into the canoe, paddled along the shore, then turned and moved out toward the island. He soon had the raving outlaws aboard, and was ordered to pull lively toward a certain point on the shore. Bumble did so, but before the shore was reached, Nogle informed him of the object of their rage and haste.

The shore was soon reached and the three landed.

Then Bumble uttered a low whistle, when Foghorn Phil and Aylesworth approached them.

Nogle challenged them, but before an answer could be given, the two confederates were seized, borne to the earth and gagged. Then they were disarmed and bound. They were too much under the influence of liquor to offer resistance, though they appeared to regard the whole affair as a joke, knowing that Bumble was the most active in the matter. When they were compelled, however, to enter their own canoe again, accompanied by Foghorn Phil and Bumble, and followed by Aylesworth and the two maidens in another canoe, something of the real truth began to dawn upon their bemuddled brains: *they had been betrayed and entrapped!*

The party, with the captives, headed toward the opposite side of the river, and they were scarcely out in the moonlight when a recognition of different individuals of the party occurred, and if the outlaws were surprised on finding themselves prisoners in the hands of Foghorn Phil and Belzy Bumble, Colonel Aylesworth, Pauline and Josie were almost dumbfounded when they discovered that Nogle's companion, addressed as Roche, was no other than Roscoe Rhymm, captain of the Big Horn Traders!

The party soon reached the east shore of the river unobserved by the traders on the island below; and having landed, made their way down Milk river. They soon reached its mouth, then turned down the Missouri. Half an hour's journeying brought them to where Dick Trout and the rest of his companions had tied up the flatboat to await their coming, he having defeated the Indians without the loss of a man in the conflict on the boat.

The party of men and women were taken aboard the raft, when another meeting of silent love and joy took place between two loving hearts—those of Frank Bassett and Josie Markham. With inward rage Captain Rhymm witnessed the joyous meeting of the lovers. He knew, now, beyond a doubt, why it was that his own devotions had been unrewarded by Josie.

As he sat a prisoner upon the boat, among those who, but a few hours before, would have willingly obeyed his mandate, he thought over his defeat and its probable result. He finally came to the conclusion that he had only been arrested for being caught in company with Nogle; that no one knew of his complicity in the abduction of the girls; nor the part he had taken in the attempted massacre of his own friends at the island, besides many other dark crimes that lay hidden behind the veil of years. So he calmed his emotions with the belief that he would soon be set at liberty, if not restored to his command of the boat.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT THE BAR OF BORDER JUSTICE.

The scene is changed and the time early morn. It is the morn following the night of events just narrated; and the scene is a group of men, among whom are three females, seated in a circle under some forest trees on the south side of the Missouri river, about five miles from the mouth of the Milk. It was a court scene

upon the border—a court convened for the trial of men who had violated the laws of man.

The party is composed of the survivors of Big Horn Traders, Pauline Afton, Josie Markham, Anamosa the Indian princess, and two prisoners. The latter are Nat Nogle and Roscoe Rhymm, who, with scowls of vengeance and scorn upon their faces, sit in the center of the circle, their limbs bound.

After the preliminaries of the trial had been made, one Henry Wing, a stalwart hunter of grave demeanor, stepped from the circle and confronting the prisoners said:

"Nathaniel Nogle and Roscoe Rhymm, you are now about to be tried by a court of border justice for grave charges, of which I hope you will both prove yourselves clear. You, Nathaniel Nogle, are to be tried for complicity in the abduction of 'em two gals, and for the murder of Alf De Ramee."

Nogle grew pale and his lips quivered. He was about to speak when Wing continued:

"And you, Roscoe Rhymm, in whom we have all placed unshaken confidence heretofore—you are to be tried for several offenses. The first is the betrayal of us fellers into the hands of the Indians last night at the island. The second is the attempted murder of Colonel Aylesworth up the river yesterday; and the third is the attempted murder of your lawfully wedded wife. If we don't produce evidence enough to hang you on these charges, you'll be handed over to the Government to be tried for some meanness at Washington City, on or about the fourteenth of April, five years ago."

By this time, terror was written upon every feature of Rhymm's face. He knew something of the stern, relentless character of these border courts. He knew that, where the evidence was strong, punishment was swift. There was no appealing the case to higher courts, save to the bar of God. But to conceal his emotions, he said:

"Gentlemen, this is a contemptible mockery of justice. It is not within the jurisdiction of such a self-appointed court of ignorant men, and scoundrels—"

"Judge, I call the prisoner to order," said Foghorn Phil.

"Order! order!" cried Judge Dick Trout, who had been appointed judge in reality, and who, in his buck-skin ermine, assumed the responsibility with a seriousness and gravity of demeanor which told that he had the matter deeply at heart. "If the prisoner has anything to say, let him speak to the p'int."

"I am not guilty of one of the preferred charges, and I defy you to bring a man that will swear that I am," said Rhymm.

"Very well, Mr. Rhymm," said the judge. "We are now ready for the trial, and will call a witness on the first charge; Belzy Bumble?"

"Here, ye honor," answered Bumble.

"Step forward and be sworn."

Bumble advanced and was sworn by the judge, who then said:

"Mr. Bumble, you'll now state what ye know about Roscoe Rhymm being in league with our enemies."

"Wal, judge," said Bumble, "I war in the employ of the Milk Riverites as scout, and one day I heard both these prisoners make a bargain with Alf De Ramee to kidnap them gals. Then I hear them make some 'rangment bout entrappin' all the Big Horn Traders, and confiscatin' their cargo, trade it to the Indians, take the proceeds and the gals, and slope to regions unknown. Captain Rhymm and Captain Nogle were in constant communication with each other, Jake Du Busk being Rhymm's right-hand bower in your party. As soon as I found out that these two men were villains, I stayed in the employ of the Milk Rivers to keep watch on their captain, and to defeat his wicked plans; and think I have done some good by it. And so that's my story, judge, in a nut-shell."

Bumble sat down and a breathless silence ensued; it was finally broken, however, by the judge, who said:

"If that's any other that wants to testify on this charge, let him git up and spit it out." But no one appearing, the judge continued: "Thar 'pears to be no one, so we'll take up the second charge—that of the attempted murder of Colonel Aylesworth, yesterday. Foghorn Phillip, what have you to solemnly swear on this case?"

Foghorn Phil arose, was sworn and then said:

"Yer honor, yesterday as we war comin' down the river, as ye all know, a shot was fired from shore and came mortal nigh lettin' the daylights outen the colonel. We all up with our rifles, as ye know, and let blizer into the bushes where the shot come from, and the next

instant a savage sprung from the thicket and fell dead, as we thought. So Jake Du Bush and me went ashore to inquire into the matter; and, as ye know, we found Captain Rhymn layin' in the same thicket badly wounded by our bullets. He and the Injin had both been there, tho' I don't say that they knowed each other war there."

"Then you can't swear, can you, whether the Injin or prisoner fired the shot?" said the judge.

"Yes I kin, judge. I can swcar that Rhymn fired the shot, for the instant Jake and me reached the shore, I picked up the Injin's gun and Rhymn's gun, and examined them. *The Injin's gun war loaded and Rhymn's war not! Its muzzle war p'inted toward the river.* And now, judge, you have my story on the subject."

Phil sat down and Colonel Aylesworth was called and sworn.

"Colonel," said the judge, "have you any idea what object the prisoner at the bar had in killin' you?"

"I have," replied the colonel, "though the fact never occurred to me until quite recently. I always had a good opinion of the prisoner and put great confidence in his honesty and integrity—so much so, that I revealed a secret to him—the secret of my mission to this country. Had I known then what I know now, he would have been the last person I should have told the secret to. The secret is this: I am in this country as a Government detective, in search of one Henri Brentford, who was in some way, connected with the assassination at Washington, five years ago; and it now turns out that this man Rhymn is Henri Brentford. So, if it really were he that attempted my life yesterday, you will readily conceive his object."

The colonel took his seat, when other witnesses in the case were called for, but none appearing, the judge said:

"We will now take up the third charge against the prisoner: that of the attempted murder of his wife."

Every eye was fixed upon the prisoner when this charge was announced; and it was seen that the sneer and contemptuous smile of bravado that had hitherto marked his features, now relaxed into a look of abject horror.

"Will Foghorn Phillip please take the stand again," asked the judge, "and tell what he knows about the matter?"

Phil again rose and said:

"Yer honor, I know plaguey little about this matter, but what I do know'll have a bearin', I reckon, on the case. Two years ago last November, I war crossin' the valley of the Powder river all alone, with a quarter o' deer on my shoulder, and war tryin' to reach the Powder timber to git wood fur a fire; but afore I got there, an all-fired big snow-storm come up, and I couldn't see an inch ahead o' me; so I just sot right down on the plain and let the storm go on. In a little while I war snowed tetotally under, but I sot there more'n an hour, then I felt somethin' jarrin' the ground under me, and got a leetle skeery and poked my head outen the snow and looked around. The storm had ceased, and the moon was shinin', and what should I see but a man and woman on hossback come chargin' across the plain with a hull pack o' wolves at their animals' heels. They dashed right apast me, and although they were bundled up, I knowed 'em both. One war Herman Rochelle, that very Captain Rhymn, and the woman, his wife, Camilla. I knowed her years afore, and always thought a mighty sight o' her, but when she married Rochelle, I kem off out West and never see'd her till that night again. Then I only got a glimpse at her face and it looked so wan and sad that I said to myself, 'Phil, that woman's in trouble; that's sumthin' wrong,' but, duckin' my head under the snow again to escape the wolves, I stayed there till they'd passed, then I looked out again. But the storm-riders war gone out o' sight, but, away to'ards the Black Pass in the Painter Hills, I could hear the howlin' and yowlin' o' that awful pack o' wolves. So up I jumped, and away I went, directly on the track o' the storm-riders."

Here Phil concluded, and Belzebub Bumble being called, testified as follows:

"On the same night spoken of by Foghorn Phillip, I war encamped in a little cavern that opened into the Black Pass of the Panther Hills. I'd struck a leetle fire, and sot down before it, and war takin' the world mighty easy, warm and dry, when, all of a sudden I heard an awful racket in the pass outside.

"I up and rushed to the mouth of the cavern, and sich a noise I never heard. It seemed as though a million wolves war comin' west, through the pass, and I began to feel skeery,

when all ter once a man and woman on hossback come ridin' up the way like rip, chased by them wolves. At fust I thought they war phantoms, and I'd think so yet but for one thing. Jist as they got fo'nt me, the man reached out and pushed the woman from her hoss, and said—'Thar, curse ye, die,' and on he galloped, like the 'tarnal devil that he war.'

"But an awful, pitiful scream come from the woman's lips—a scream that went right to Belzy Bumble's ole heart, so out I sprung, grabbed the poor thing up, and carried her into the cave afore the wolves could harm a hair of her he'd. I took her to the fire and onwrapt her, and tolle her she war safe, but it war a long hour before she'd b'lieve me, and kept cryin' and cryin' as though her heart war broke, and sayin'—'He'll come and kill me.'"

"I axed her who'd kill her, and she said her husband; and then I axed her who her husband war, and she said Herman Rochelle. She said her name war Camilla, and that her and her husband had started to the settlement away up the Powder, but he had deceived her, and led her off thar on purpose, she knowed, to freeze her to death or kill her."

"She told me an awful pitiful and sad story of her life. How she'd been compelled to marry Herman Rochelle against her will. Her uncle, with whom she lived, for her parents war both dead, thought Rochelle as rich as Cruses, and made her marry him; and it seemed as though he married her for wealth, for her mean uncle told him she war heir to a large fortune back East."

"She told me more: she said she had loved another man once, and was sure she had seen his face lookin' up from the snow that night at her, as if to mock her helplessness and sorry. And while she war tellin' this, who should stalk into the cavern but the very ole lover of her'n? and, would ye believe it, yer honor, that ole lover war Foghorn Phillip, that very chap sittin' yander."

An exclamation of surprise burst from the lips of the listeners, and confusion reigned for several minutes. But the court having restored order, Bumble continued:

"But the wust is to come, judge: that same night that purty young woman disappeared from the cave, and not until yesterday was she heard of. In fact, Phil and me never looked much for her, and we supposed she had got out of her mind and slipped out of the cave when we warn't watchin', and had been eat up by the wolves. We could find no trace of her, for it snowed like blazes all night, and the next mornin' the ground war under three feet of snow. But, judge, she's all right now, and so you have all my evidence and it's true, so help me, God!"

A deep and profound silence followed this disclosure of Rhymn's wickedness, but it was finally broken by the judge, who asked:

"Prisoner at the bar, have you anything to say 'bout this awful crime of yourn?"

"Yes," replied the villain, rising to his feet. "I wish to say that every word uttered by Foghorn Phil and Belzebub Bumble is false. I see there is a conspiracy on foot to put Nogle and myself out of the way. There is no honor, justice nor truth in such a farce of a tribunal, gotten up by a pack of ignorant cowards, and—"

"Hold! Stop! Order!" roared the judge, with a withering frown, while his hand, through force of habit, mechanically sought the knife at his girdle. "I'll have you shot for contempt of court, if ye don't use proper language. There now, go on."

Order being restored, Rhymn continued:

"I have nothing further to say, more than repeat what I have already said—every word of them two men is an infamous lie!"

"Has any one anything further to offer on this charge?" asked the court.

"I have a few words to say," said Anamosa, the Indian princess, rising from her seat between Pauline and Josie. "I desire to say that all the two hunters have testified to is true. I know the prisoner calling himself Roscoe Rhymn; he is Herman Rochelle, and I know he attempted to murder his wife that stormy November night, in the Black Pass of the Panther mountains, just because he was deceived in getting a fortune when he married her. I say I know this to be true, for I, Anamosa, am Camilla Rochelle, the lawfully wedded wife of that villain at the bar!"

A murmur of surprise and indignation passed from the lips of most of the party, for there were but few in the party that were aware of this fact before the princess had made it known.

Rochelle, alias Roscoe Rhymn, turned deadly pale and his lips trembled with inward surprise and terror. He turned, and with dilated

eyes gazed upon the face of the supposed Indian Princess, whom he now recognized, for the first time, as the fair woman whom he believed he had thrown into the jaws of the ravenous wolves on that stormy November night, years before. The villain was completely overcome, and without uttering a word, sat quietly down, with abject fear written upon every feature. He had possessed the bravado to dispute the hunters and declare their statements false, but now he quailed before that frail young creature, as though the hand of doom was already upon him.

This ended the trial of Herman Rochelle, but judgment was deferred by the court, until Nat Nogle had been tried; for, in his case, other evidence would no doubt be brought out, criminating the captain of the Big Horn Traders still deeper.

The principal witness in Nogle's case was Belzebub Bumble, who made some startling disclosures concerning both Nogle and Rhymn. The trial occupied but a short time, and then came a decision of the court.

Before it was given, however, Colonel Aylesworth, Frank Bassett and a couple of the traders took the three females and set out for the river, leaving the judge, Foghorn Phil, Bumble, and others to take care of the prisoners. But, scarcely had they reached the river and got aboard the flatboat, before those left behind came up. The prisoners were not with them, and no one asked where they were. All knew too well with what a stern, merciless hand border justice deals with its violators.

The party at once embarked on the flatboat down the river, Bumble and Phil taking the safety of the little band under their charge.

During the journey several secrets of a surprising nature were revealed to the party. One was, of Belzebub Bumble, not only being a scout in the employ of the Milk River Traders, but a spy upon each individual of the same party, in the employ of the Government detective, Colonel Aylesworth.

Camilla Rochelle also told why she had kept her existence from the world a secret so long. It was to bring punishment upon her heartless husband when he least expected it—when the blow would be the severest. After she had escaped from the cavern in the Black Pass, that terrible November night, she made her way to the village of the Blackfoot Indians, where she was kindly received. On expressing a desire to live there, a chief adopted her as his daughter, and called her Anamosa, the White Fawn. She stained her skin with pigments given her by the Indians, and all the wealth of the tribe was lavished upon her. But all the time, by the assistance of the chief, she kept a close watch upon the movements of her heartless husband. The phantom seen during the journey down the river was nothing more or less than Camilla, who had thrown aside her disguise, and appeared at times, in sight of the crew in order to work up the feelings of Rhymn.

Before sunset that day, the party reached the little steamer to which Pauline and Josie belonged, and the safe return of the maidens was celebrated as a happy and joyous event, by the little band of excursionists.

That evening the boat started on its return to the fort, where it arrived safe and sound.

A year has passed since the events of our story transpired, and in this time many changes have taken place in the lives of our characters. Some have passed from earth, some are married, and some gone—I know not where.

Colonel Aylesworth and Pauline were among those married. They celebrated the happy event shortly after their sojourn in the West; and not long after this event, Frank Bassett and Josephine Markham became man and wife, and now live in a full enjoyment of their married life, never tiring of narrating the adventures connected with their first acquaintance and love.

But stop! we have to record another wedding that grew out of that summer's adventure on the Missouri. Our hero, Foghorn Phil, led to the altar the pretty little widow, Camilla Rochelle, his old love, and no happier pair ever cast lots together. But, they seldom speak of that wild November night, when Camilla saw her Phillip's face gazing up at her from the white, frosty snow, as, side by side with Herman Rochelle, she galloped across the valley of the Powder river. The mentioning of it recalls bitter recollections. But in a pleasant little home in the Far West the two reside; and beneath their humble roof, those who have figured in our romance always find a hearty welcome, especially the eccentric "Judge Trout," and the remarkable Belzebub Bumble.

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